

**AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO ASSIMILATION AND MENTAL  
HEALTH AMONG MEXICAN-ORIGIN WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES**

A Dissertation

by

SAN JUANITA E GARCIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,	Zulema Valdez
Co-Chair of Committee,	Verna Keith
Committee Members,	Rogelio Sáenz
	Holly Foster
	Linda Castillo
Head of Department,	Jane Sell

December 2014

Major Subject: Sociology

Copyright 2014 San Juanita E. García

## ABSTRACT

Anti-immigrant sentiment against Mexicans in the United States has had a dramatic influence on the lives of the Mexican-origin population (or those presumed Mexican) and on how they perceive the host society. Until now, little research has addressed the extent to which this hostility has affected their mental health. Drawing on 90 face-to-face interviews with undocumented, documented, and U.S.-born Mexican American women from Houston, Texas, I adopt an intersectional approach to examine how a negative context of reception shapes their susceptibility to depressive symptoms.

There are four major findings. First, undocumented Mexican immigrant women experience a deportation threat directly. They experience: constant fear of deportation; family fragmentation; and economic uncertainty, making them susceptible to depressive symptoms.

Second, the consequences of undocumented status extend beyond the undocumented population to the Mexican-origin community (or those that appear to be Mexicans) through what I call *undocumented vicariousness*. Therefore, both documented Mexican immigrant and Mexican American women experience a deportation threat indirectly, also making them susceptible to depressive symptoms.

Third, documented Mexican immigrant women experience *undocumented vicariousness* if they have: mixed-status families; and/or experiential knowledge having once been undocumented immigrants themselves. Mexican American women experience *undocumented vicariousness* if they have: mixed-status families; a romantic partner or

husband that is undocumented; and/or identify with the immigrant plight. The major differences between how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out for these two groups relates to the: lack of dating/marriage partners that are undocumented for the documented Mexican immigrant women compared to the Mexican American women; and the experiential knowledge associated with Mexican Americans not living as undocumented immigrants themselves.

Fourth, a racialization process exists where immigrants, regardless of legal status, nativity and ties with the undocumented community, are perceived and treated as undocumented immigrants. This contributes towards how Mexican-origin women negotiate and understand their intersectional identities, feelings of belonging, and exclusion, particularly in today's deportation regime and anti-immigrant climate.

These findings highlight the salience of undocumented status as another marker of inequality and stratification and add to the growing interest on "illegality" and its impacts on mental health disparities by using an intersectionality approach.

## **DEDICATORIA/DEDICATION**

Para mi madrecita querida, María Rita García, que siempre me apoyó en todas mis metas. Por fin termino el doctorado como se lo prometí. Gracias por darme las fuerzas y por ser la mejor madre. Agradezco todos sus sacrificios. Sé que desde el cielo me sigue cuidando. La extraño con todo mi corazón.

En Memoria de María Rita García (1949 – 2011)

Para mi hermano, Juan Miguel García, que sé que también estarías muy orgulloso de tu hermanita que por fin termina el doctorado. I hope to continue making you proud.

En Memoria de Juan Miguel García (1976 – 2009)

Para mi padre Juan García. Estoy muy agradecida por todos sus consejos y apoyo. Lo quiero mucho. Un día a la vez... Y aquí seguimos echándole muchas ganas, pues no hay de otra.

Para las mujeres que participaron en este estudio. Les agradezco la confianza. Gracias a ustedes este estudio fue posible. Les deseo lo mejor.

To all the women that participated in this study. I appreciate you confiding in me.

Thanks to you this study has been possible. Wishing you the best.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot believe this day has finally arrived. The day I write the acknowledgements, after completing this incredibly difficult, yet extremely rewarding endeavor, was a day that I often dreamed of. I still cannot believe it. I am grateful to have made it this far and have many people to thank.

I thank the women who graciously accepted to participate in this study. If it were not for you, I would not be able to get my degree.

I thank my family. This includes my immediate, adoptive, KDX *familia*, all my friends, especially Elizabeth Govea and her family, and Santiago Solache.

I thank my dissertation committee and especially my two mentors, Zulema Valdez and Rogelio Sáenz. I am especially grateful to Zulema, who always pushed me to the limits. She is a great scholar, mentor, and friend, who not only has helped me academically, but has also helped me grow personally. I am thankful to Rogelio because he was the one who encouraged me to apply to Texas A&M University's Ph.D. program. I know I have been extremely fortunate to have received amazing mentorship from these two great scholars. Both are deeply committed to mentoring and training the next generation. They have provided me support, guidance, and encouragement. It is my hope that I can also make an impact in other students' lives. I am also grateful to Verna Keith, Holly Foster, and Linda Castillo, who served on my dissertation committee. Each has provided valuable insight to my research.

I would also like to thank several professors that have paved the way for me from Sam Houston State University. I thank Karen Douglas, Lydia Cruz Fox, and Bernice Strauss. Karen Douglas also encouraged me to apply to graduate school, and in particular to Texas A&M. I am grateful to have met Lydia Cruz Fox, the McNair Scholars Director. I'm fortunate to have participated as a McNair Scholar, SROP Fellow, and REU as an undergraduate student. These experiences assisted me in my transition from undergraduate to graduate student. I am indebted to Bernice and her family for taking me in as one of their own. I am thankful to have your support and friendship. I also want to thank my friends: Pete Nuñez, Belen Polanco, Marilyn Diaz, my sorority sisters especially my big and grandbig Crissy Mascorro and Mercedes Rodriguez.

At Texas A&M University, I am grateful to the amazing friends I have made throughout my graduate training. I am especially appreciative to (in no particular order): Eugenia Conde, Evelyn Espinoza, Lorena Murga, Brittany Rico, Cristina Cruz, Linda Muñoz, Jennifer Mueller, Frank Ortega, Oscar Morales, and Calixto Melero. I am also extremely grateful to other friends that I have met from outside my department. I thank Mayra Miranda, Fabiola Rangel, Carlos Estrada, Indara Suarez, and the friends I have met though a Skype writing group. You all have made an isolating experience social. Thank you for all your advice and support. I am very lucky to call y'all my friends. I am grateful to my night owl friends who at times stayed up with me all night to work on fellowship applications, papers, and of course the dissertation. These friends also insisted we party hard too.

I also want to thank David Embrick, Daniel Delgado, Rosalind Chou, Tony Love, Carlton Mathis, and other alumni for all their support and advice on the “job market.” I also want to thank several faculty members from the department who have encouraged me on several levels: Wendy Moore, Mark Fossett, Nancy Plankey Videla, Jane Sell, Reuben May, Joseph Jewell, Joe Feagin, Ed Murguia, Dudley Poston, Alex McIntosh, Hiroshi Ono. I must thank Bethany Edwards and Christi Ramirez too!

I am also extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to write my dissertation at the University of California, Merced. I enjoyed meeting the first Ph.D. class. I wish you all the best in your graduate training. I am especially thankful to Tanya Golash-Boza, Nella Van Dyke, Paul Almeida, Irene Beattie, and Karen Perez. Thank you for all your advice and tips as I was completing the dissertation and applying for jobs. I’m especially grateful to Zulema Valdez for offering me the opportunity to join her at UCM while I wrote the dissertation! It was a great experience for me, especially since I had never left Texas! I hope to one day return to California. I also want to thank Rosalina Nuñez Acosta for her Research Assistance. It was great working with you!

I also want to thank the fellowships that have made my research and graduate program training possible. I have been extremely fortunate to have received several fellowships and grants which have made it possible for me to conduct interviews and provide incentives to the women I interviewed. I am also grateful for all the professional development and mentorship I have received because of my fellowships. I am especially indebted to the ASA Minority Fellowship Program and the Ford Foundation Fellowship Program. Both of these programs foster a unique and comforting space for scholars of

color in the academy. I have made many of my closest friends through these programs. In particular, I want to thank Rachel Sarabia, Jerry Flores, Jesse Diaz, Brianne Davila, Laura Enriquez, Tiffany Joseph, and others who I have met through these fellowships. I'm especially grateful to Jean Shin, who is very supportive of all MFP Fellows! I look forward to staying connected with both the MFP and Ford Fellowship Programs!

Finally I thank my partner David Chow. I am very lucky to have you in my life. You have kept me strong. I have learned so much from you and I look forward to many more years together. Although we are far away from each other, we make it work. I love you very much!



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATORIA/DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION .....	1
Research Aims.....	3
Research Questions .....	3
Theoretical Frameworks & Background Literature .....	4
Brief Description of Data & Methods .....	8
Definition of Key Terms .....	8
Outline of Dissertation Chapters .....	11
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS .....	13
Anti-immigrant Sentiment.....	13
Demographic Transformations: Undocumented Mexican Migration .....	14
Immigration, Ethnicity, Race, & Illegality.....	15
Segmented Assimilation Theory .....	17
Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Race Theory.....	19
Critiques of Assimilation Research from LatCrit Scholars.....	20
Shortcomings of Segmented Assimilation Theory.....	22
Intersectionality Theory .....	25
Intersectionality and Immigration .....	27
The Intersectionality of Illegality and Race .....	30
The Importance of Highlighting Undocumented Status .....	31
Latina/o Health Paradox and Mental Health .....	33
Disentangling the Latina/o Health Paradox .....	34
My Approach.....	35
An Intersectionality Approach to Studying Illegality and Mental Health .....	36
Conclusion.....	37

CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODS .....	39
Description of the Research Site .....	40
Data Collection.....	41
Description of the Sample .....	41
Recruitment .....	44
The Interviews.....	47
Data Analysis .....	52
Limitations and Future Research.....	54
Rationale for Pursuing this Study: Intellectual Motivations .....	55
Standpoint Epistemology .....	58
My Personal Motivation & Passion: Bringing Emotions to the Forefront.....	60
Positionality.....	60
Personal Motivations.....	62
Reciprocity .....	63
Emotional Labor.....	66
Conclusion.....	70
CHAPTER IV LIVING A DEPORTATION THREAT: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS .....	71
Research Questions & Aims of the Chapter.....	72
Segmented Assimilation.....	73
Mental Health Risk Factors Associated with Illegality.....	75
The Latina/o Health Paradox.....	76
Social Determinants of Health .....	78
Immigrant Health: Bringing Undocumented Status to the Forefront.....	78
Depressive Symptoms .....	79
Coming to the United States: Renata's Journey to El Norte .....	80
Coming to the United States: Rita's Journey to El Norte, 1.25 Generation.....	84
The American Context of Reception & Depressive Symptoms.....	86
Life as an Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Woman Today .....	88
What is Depression?.....	89
A Deportation Threat: We Live it Everyday .....	92
Constant Fear.....	93
Family Fragmentation .....	97
Economic Uncertainty.....	99
Discrimination and Exclusion .....	104
Discussion: Unauthorized Status and Its Implications for Mental Health .....	108
Conclusion.....	112

CHAPTER V UNDOCUMENTED VICARIOUSNESS AND DEPRESSIVE  
SYMPTOMS AMONG DOCUMENTED MEXICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN ..... 114

“Illegality” and Boundary Making Between Immigrants .....	115
Research Questions & Aims of the Chapter.....	116
Common Experiences .....	117
Language .....	118
Differences: “Finally I Can Visit My Family and Mexico” .....	119
Context of Exit and Entry into the United States .....	121
Entering the U.S. with Papers: Who Comes Legally? .....	124
Becoming Undocumented: Fluidity of Illegality .....	128
Living with Papers, Transitioning Statuses: “ <i>Sin Papeles, Ya No</i> ” .....	131
Age of Migration, Generation Status, & Age of Legalization Matters .....	134
Luz: 1.75 Generation.....	135
The Racialization of Illegality: Identity Formation, Belonging, and Exclusion .....	140
Microaggressions: The Cumulative Impacts of Illegality .....	141
Deportation: The Greatest Representation of Exclusion.....	149
Deportations are Fragmenting Families and Creating a Mental Health Threat .....	151
From a Deportation Threat to Depressive Symptoms.....	154
Gabriela: Documented Immigrant Woman with Undocumented Children .....	155
Sandra: Experiential Knowledge as an Undocumented Immigrant .....	157
Conclusion.....	159

CHAPTER VI UNDOCUMENTED VICARIOUSNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH  
AMONG MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ..... 161

Research Questions & Aims of the Chapter.....	162
Mexican American Women Living in an Anti-Immigrant Climate.....	164
Being a Mexican American Woman in a Juan Crow Era .....	165
The Complexities of Demarcating Generation Statuses .....	167
“I’m Mexican <i>Mexican</i> ”: Identifying with the Immigrant Experience .....	172
I’m Equally Proud of Being a Mexican and American Woman .....	179
“I’m American” .....	187
Racialization Experiences – Perceived and Treated as Outsiders.....	192
From a Deportation Threat to Depressive Symptoms.....	196
Deportation Threats, Undocumented Vicariousness, and Mental Health .....	197
Undocumented Vicariousness: U.S.-born Mexican American Women.....	198
Betty: Mexican American Woman Impacted by Deportations in Family.....	200
Elena: Mexican American Woman and Undocumented Husband and Partner .....	203
Margarita: Identifying with the Plight of the Undocumented Experience .....	210
Conclusion.....	213

CHAPTER VII DISCUSSION.....	215
Research Findings .....	216
Findings & Theoretical Frameworks: What Does Illegality Have To Do With It? ...	224
Segmented Assimilation Theory .....	224
Intersectionality .....	226
Mental Health and Undocumented Status .....	227
Significance of Research .....	228
Conclusion.....	229
CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS .....	231
Research Limitations & Future Research.....	236
Broader Implications .....	240
Policy Recommendations.....	242
REFERENCES.....	246
APPENDIX A .....	266
APPENDIX B .....	268
APPENDIX C .....	270
APPENDIX D .....	273
APPENDIX E.....	276
APPENDIX F .....	279
APPENDIX G .....	281
Mind Map 1: Findings for Mexican-Origin Women.....	281
APPENDIX H .....	282
Mind Map 2: Findings for Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women .....	282
APPENDIX I.....	283
Mind Map 3: Undocumented Vicariousness.....	283
APPENDIX J.....	284
Venn Diagram: Undocumented Vicariousness: Documented Mexican Immigrant Women .....	284

APPENDIX K .....	285
Venn Diagram: Undocumented Vicariousness: Mexican American Women.....	285

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United States is often portrayed as a democratic nation with ideas promoting an American ideology, including beliefs in a meritocratic, individualist, and a color-blind society. The U.S. promotes an American Dream ideology, which suggests that anyone can become successful as long as they work hard. These ideologies are problematic and mask the complex struggles associated with the experiences of immigrants of color and their communities. They belittle the systems of oppression that create the conditions for these struggles. Instead these false ideologies are promoted and put the onus and pressure on the individual while ignoring the structural inequalities that impede certain groups from “succeeding” in the United States.

In the minds of many immigrants, the United States is viewed as a place that has opportunities to better themselves and their families’ lives. Immigrants buy into this ideology and migrate searching for a place where their dreams can become realities. However, it does not take long for their dreams to become shattered as they are confronted with structural barriers, especially the undocumented population. This prompts them to question the attainability of the American Dream. Soon they realize the American Dream is not attainable for all, especially not for immigrant groups that are targets of xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigrant sentiment, such as the Mexican undocumented population.

This dissertation focuses on two highly contested contemporary topics: immigration and mental health. The current political debates, surrounding immigration reform and healthcare, make this dissertation significant and timely. It sits at the nexus of immigration, mental health, and race. This study sheds light on how undocumented status and an anti-immigrant sentiment impact Mexican-origin women's depressive symptoms across legal status and nativity in Houston, TX. It highlights the incorporation experiences of Mexican-origin women especially living in an anti-immigrant society and mass deportation era. It makes important contributions showing how unauthorized status not only signifies a deportation threat but can also pose a mental health threat.

Unauthorized status has broader implications that extend across nativity (e.g. U.S.-born versus foreign born) and different legal statuses (e.g. legal permanent resident versus unauthorized). It is often the case that U.S.-born Mexicans are often perceived and racialized as not simply immigrants but undocumented immigrants. "Go home illegal." Comments and sentiments such as these are all too common in today's society. Mexican Americans and documented immigrants can be perceived, labeled, and treated as unauthorized immigrants. Through a racialization process, race and legal status becomes conflated.

Racism coupled with an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment and heightened levels of surveillance by the Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agency, immigrants and those perceived to be immigrants, are more vulnerable to experiencing discrimination, racism, and inequality. In this hostile context, the Mexican-origin

population is particularly at risk for negative mental health outcomes. Yet, scant attention has been given to the relationship between this social environment and ethnic minority mental health outcomes (Vega and Rumbaut 1991; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

Previous research has documented the stress attributed to roles and statuses humans occupy in the U.S. social structure. Yet less attention has been placed on the stress that humans experience simultaneously due to race, nativity, ethnicity, and cultural differences (Brown 2003; 2008; Brown and Keith 2003; Carter 1994; Rogler, Cortes, and Malgady 1991; Salgado de Snyder 1987; Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). However, even lesser attention has been placed on the role legal status plays on immigrant groups mental health outcomes (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim 2012).

### **Research Aims**

This dissertation contributes to the burgeoning interest in immigrant mental health disparities by using an intersectionality approach. More specifically, it sheds light on the social construction of “illegality” and racialized experiences among Mexican-origin women. The guiding research questions are:

### **Research Questions**

- (1) In the context of a negative societal reception, how does illegality shape Mexican-origin women’s mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?
- (2) How do intersectional identities rooted in race, ethnicity, class, legal status, and nativity affect Mexican-origin women’s incorporation processes and their mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?



## **Theoretical Frameworks & Background Literature**

This research is informed by an interdisciplinary body of literature on immigration (particularly segmented assimilation theory), intersectionality, and mental health. Segmented assimilation theory (SAT) is the dominant approach to immigrant incorporation. SAT forecasts a fragmented form of incorporation associated with divergent paths for immigrant groups and their children (Portes and Zhou 1993).

SAT places an emphasis on the context of reception, arguing that it shapes the structure of opportunities and intensifies the structural barriers immigrant groups encounter upon arrival (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). The contexts of reception refer to a group of factors affecting an immigrant group's mode of incorporation into the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). The most relevant contexts of reception are defined by: "1) the policies of the receiving government; 2) the conditions of the host labor market; and 3) the characteristics of their own ethnic communities" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:92-93).

Overall, scholars adopting a segmented assimilation theoretical framework have focused on socioeconomic outcomes. For example, researchers have investigated the segmented assimilation trajectories of the Mexican-origin population by focusing on educational attainment (Abrego and Gonzalez 2010; Hirschman 2001), self-employment outcomes (Valdez 2006; Valenzuela Jr. 2003), and labor force participation (Passel and Cohn 2010; Portes and Bach 1985), to name a few. Although there are some studies that focus on immigrant incorporation in terms of non-economic indicators, such as intermarriage (Alba and Nee 2003; Qian and Lichter 2007; Telles and Ortiz 2008) and

ethnic and racial identity formation (Jiménez 2010; Rumbaut 1994; Sanders 2002; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Waters 1994), fewer studies have considered how the incorporation process can be linked to a negative societal reception context spurred by an anti-immigrant climate and unauthorized legal status.

Indeed, empirical research demonstrating how a negative context of reception impacts the mental health outcomes of Mexican-origin women is limited (Castro et al. 2010; Cook et al. 2009; Horevitz and Organista 2012; Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). This study focuses on a negative context of reception, one defined by an anti-immigrant, nativist, and racist reception that exacerbates conditions of illegality for Mexican-origin women. Moreover, this study highlights the detrimental impacts a negative context of reception has on Mexican-origin women's depressive symptoms across legal status and nativity.

In order to analyze these data from a critical and structural approach, I use intersectionality theory. An intersectional approach provides an avenue in which traditional methods of studying race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other social locations are challenged or questioned. It brings to the forefront the importance of viewing the intersections of all identities in explaining social phenomena. Furthermore, an intersectional approach allows scholars to highlight the oppressive experiences of marginalized groups and the privileged positions of dominant groups in society.

An intersectionality perspective has been employed by researchers focusing on the U.S. labor market (Browne and Misra 2003); entrepreneurship (Valdez 2011); health disparities (Schulz and Mullings 2006); law (Crenshaw 1991); families (Collins 2000);

and immigration (Romero 2008b; Johnson 2004) among other interdisciplinary areas.

Recent scholarship is pushing towards using intersectionality theory in discussing immigrant health. For example, Brown, Donato, Laske, and Duncan (2013) write:

Researchers studying mental health should consider simultaneously race, nativity, ethnicity, and cultural influences. We propose that this approach would result in a more interesting, theoretically informed, reliable, and valid understanding of mental health status (p. 267).

Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim (2012) encourage scholars to use intersectionality theory in explaining immigrant health disparities. They are critical of research that has overemphasized culture without critically examining the impacts that structural problems, such as racism, immigration policies, racialization processes, have on health outcomes. They write:

... While culture may indeed play a role in shaping immigrant health outcomes, examining the ways in which immigration intersects with race, class, and gender is crucial to gaining a better understanding of change in these outcomes. As such, intersectionality theory can serve as a guiding framework in shifting the focus away from individual-level conceptualizations of culture in immigrant health research, to structural examinations that take into account the power dimensions of race, class, gender, and immigrant status hierarchies and how these shape inequities (p. 2100).

An intersectional approach decenters the emphasis on ethnic group membership by bringing in other salient social group formations like race, gender, and notably, legal status and nativity, to show how these distinct yet intersecting identities fuse to shape Mexican-origin women's mental health outcomes in ways that have not been considered fully in previous research. My approach brings new insights and directions to better understand the process of incorporation among disadvantaged populations. I highlight the importance on focusing on legal status as yet another form of oppression or privilege.

Likewise, I hope to highlight the importance on showing how legal status is imbued with racial meaning (Donato and Armenta 2011; Golash-Boza 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero 2008a) to immigration scholars.

I focus exclusively on women because my aim is to compare their experiences across legal status and nativity in order to highlight the complexities and nuances associated with illegality. Although depression affects both men and women, it is generally regarded as a gendered problem impacting women (Stoppard 2000). However, it is unclear if women are more likely than men to seek services for depression because of the social constructions associated with femininity, making it more socially acceptable, or whether mental health professionals overly respond to women's distress while dismissing men's symptoms (Falicov 2003). This is one explanation as to why women may be more likely to be diagnosed with depression (Denmark et al. 2000; Falicov 2003). Previous research has documented the ways in which depressive symptoms are manifested across gender suggesting men are more likely to engage in alcoholism and substance abuse (Cochran and Rabinowitz 2000; Oliver and Toner 1990). This dissertation lays the groundwork for future research to include men as another comparison group.

Past research on immigrant mental health has shown that immigrants enjoy lower rates and risks of psychiatric disorders, including depression, when compared against U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Finch, Kolody, and Vega 2000; Escobar, Nervi, and Gara 2000). Yet, positive findings associated with immigrant status, or what some have

termed the “Latina/o Health Paradox,” do not account for differences across legal status. Towards this end, I merge segmented assimilation theory with intersectionality theory.

As a qualitative researcher vested in Latina/o mental health disparities, I move towards further investigating the complexities and nuances of the Latina/o health paradox. I highlight “unauthorized status” and other structural social locations that serve as major impediments and stressors in the lives of these women and their families. It is imperative to focus on the structural factors and ideological processes that limit the opportunities and continue to disenfranchise women of color in the United States.

### **Brief Description of Data & Methods**

The data for this dissertation study derives from ninety digitally voice recorded and transcribed face-to-face interviews with Mexican-origin women (30 interviews with unauthorized immigrants; 30 interviews with authorized immigrants; and 30 interviews with U.S.-born Mexican Americans) in Houston, Texas. Houston is commonly known as an immigrant gateway city (Rodriguez 1993; Valdez 2011). Interviews are the best method for me to answer my research questions as they allow me to reflect on the social content associated with depressive symptoms.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

I draw on the experiences of three Mexican-origin women groups: unauthorized Mexican immigrant; authorized Mexican immigrant; and U.S.-born Mexican American women. My aim in separating these three categories of women is not to reify bureaucratic classifications. Instead I focus on these three categories to show the complexities, fluidity, and relational constructions associated with illegality (Abrego

2014; De Genova 2002; Menjivar and Kanstroom 2014). I do not view illegality as a dichotomous relationship of “authorized” versus “unauthorized” but instead view all three categories in relation to each other. My main motive for doing this is to show how legal status is socially constructed (Donato and Armenta 2011). This study moves beyond studying the undocumented population but highlights the social relations associated with their legal status (De Genova 2002).

Illegality is “historically specific and socially, politically, and legally produced” (Abrego 2014 p. 7). By highlighting illegality, I move away from simplistic notions associated with viewing unauthorized migration as innate or a result of an individual’s decision (Abrego 2014; De Genova 2004). Instead I show how illegality has broader impacts on the Mexican-origin community impacting not only the unauthorized population but also the authorized Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities (De Genova 2002; Menjivar and Kanstroom 2014).

I use unauthorized interchangeably with the term undocumented immigrant. I use it to refer to women who are residing in the United States without the legal documentation. Some of these women could have entered the United States legally (e.g. with a tourist visa) but have overstayed it. Similarly, women in this group could be composed of those who entered the United States clandestinely by crossing the border or using fraudulent documents.

I use unauthorized or undocumented instead of “illegal.” Although all three descriptors are problematic, I refrain from using the term “illegal” for various reasons. First, the anti-immigrant rhetoric paints a superficial view on immigration masking the

deeper problems of racism and nativism. This justifies, excuses, and dismisses the nativist and racist views associated with anti-immigrant people. For example, they claim they are not racist and instead frame their arguments based on legality i.e. “legal” versus “illegal.” Similarly, this othering occurs by viewing immigrants as foreign (Feagin 1997; Feagin and Cobas 2008; Ngai 2004).

Consequently, this masks the systemic and more rooted notions of exclusion, inequality, and restrictive immigration policies that perpetuate a nativist and racist immigration system (Feagin 1997; Feagin and Cobas 2008; Johnson 2004; Ngai 2004). Secondly, because of the fluidity of “illegality” (i.e. one can be undocumented and become documented or vice versa), it is not correct to refer to people as “illegal.” Immigration policies, laws, and people’s views of immigrants is what perpetuates notions of “illegality.” Finally, I use the term undocumented or unauthorized instead with a hope of humanizing the experiences of these populations.

I also draw on data from interviews with authorized immigrant women, used interchangeably with documented immigrant women. These are women that have legal documents to be in the United States. Given the arbitrariness of legal status, some of these women could have once also been unauthorized immigrant women and if this is the case, I ask questions retrospectively about their experiences pre-legal status and post-legal status. My aim was to find women who have entered the United States as authorized immigrant women who later decided to settle in the U.S. and thus becoming legal permanent residents or U.S. citizens.

The final category of women that I interviewed is Mexican American women. These women were all born in the United States. Their generational status and family immigration histories vary. Some of these women are considered part of the second-generation (i.e. children of immigrants) while others have been in the United States for many generations.

### **Outline of Dissertation Chapters**

My dissertation has a total of eight chapters: I.) Introduction; II.) Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks; III.) Research Methods; IV.) Living a Deportation Threat: Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women and Depressive Symptoms; V.) Undocumented Vicariousness and Depressive Symptoms among Documented Mexican Immigrant Women; and VI.) Undocumented Vicariousness and Depressive Symptoms among Mexican American Women; VII.) Discussion; and VIII.) Conclusion and Policy Recommendations.

Chapter II covers the literature review and theoretical frameworks. I highlight relevant sociological and mental health literature that uses the segmented assimilation theory as a framework. I also discuss the limitations of segmented assimilation theory by using Critical Race Theory. Some of the limitations include: not adequately tackling racism, legal status, and the social consequences this has on immigrant women's incorporation and mental health. Next, I discuss research using an intersectionality framework, particularly as it pertains to Mexican-origin women, nativity, and legal status. I discuss research on mental health and more specifically depressive symptoms among Mexican-origin women in the U.S. I highlight the Latina/o Health Paradox as it



relates to mental health. I connect these bodies of literature and argue for the merging of these literatures in order to address my research questions.

Chapter III addresses the methods and analyses. I provide a detailed explanation of the methods used in this dissertation, a justification for them, a thorough description of the research site, the women that participated in this study, and procedures for collecting ninety interviews. I also provide a thorough explanation on how the analysis was conducted. Finally I highlight the personal and intellectual motivations that prompted me to undertake this study. I end this chapter by bringing emotions to the forefront of qualitative research.

Chapters IV, V, and VI are substantive chapters. Each chapter focuses on the findings from each category of women that participated in this study. Chapter IV represents the experiences of unauthorized Mexican immigrant women, Chapter V represents the experiences of the authorized Mexican immigrant women, and Chapter VI focuses on the experiences of the Mexican American women. In these chapters I present the major themes and findings.

Chapter VII is a discussion of the three substantive findings by bringing to the forefront the differences and similarities between the social statuses of these women (and how they are intersectional) further complicating their profiles and experiences. Chapter VIII and final chapter is the conclusion of this dissertation. In this chapter I reiterate the research significance of this study, discuss the research limitations, future research, and the policy implications of this study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

This dissertation research is informed by an interdisciplinary body of literature engaging the fields of immigration, mental health, and intersectionality. Merging these large bodies of literature is necessary to better understand the experiences of Mexican-origin women living in the United States – especially in the context of today’s anti-immigrant climate. This study draws from the dominant approach to immigrant incorporation, namely segmented assimilation theory. The literature review also covers a brief discussion on the critiques of assimilation theory provided by critical race scholars, and more specifically, Latina/o critical race scholars.

#### **Anti-immigrant Sentiment**

There has been a resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiment specifically targeting Latina/o immigrants and more specifically Mexican immigrants (Massey and Sánchez 2010). This has been seen in various social institutions ranging from the ways in which the media portrays the topic of undocumented Mexican immigration (Chavez 2013) to the way in which the government has focused its efforts on mass deportations and raids (Golash-Boza 2012). This has resulted in the deportation of undocumented and documented immigrants including some that have been deported for minor traffic violations (Golash-Boza 2012; 2014).

The anti-immigrant discourse prevalent in today’s society often targets Mexican immigrants contributing to the sentiment which leads to the conflation between legal

status and nativity. For example, some people equate unauthorized immigrant with Mexican (Romero 2008b). This misconception only adds fuel to the fire and is indicative of the social construction of undocumented immigrants as “illegals.” Research focusing on how anti-immigrant sentiment fuels racism and discrimination towards immigrants and how this impacts their mental health needs to be further studied (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012).

### **Demographic Transformations: Undocumented Mexican Migration**

As of 2013, there were approximately 232 million migrants worldwide (United Nations 2013). In the United States, there are over 40 million migrants representing the largest number in history (Passel and Cohn 2012). Mexican immigrants make up the largest wave of immigrants from one single country in history. Comparing the largest immigrant waves into the United States, Krogstad and Keegan (2014) find that Mexico has replaced Germany as the top sending country. In 1910, U.S. immigrants were largely from Germany, approximately 18% (or 2.5 million) of all immigrants during that era. Today, immigrants are largely from Mexico and approximately 29% (or 11.7 million) of all immigrants in the United States (Krogstad and Keegan 2014).

Latina/os are the largest and fastest growing racial and ethnic group today (Sáenz 2004). The Mexican-origin population is the largest group. In deciphering the undocumented population, Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera estimate that in 2012 there were 11.7 undocumented immigrants in the United States. This number has fallen from the all record high of 12.2 million in 2007. In 2012, there were 28.3 million legal permanent residents in the United States. The states of: California, Texas, Florida, New

Jersey, and Illinois, have over 60% of Mexican immigrants residing in them (Passel et al. 2012).

Research has also shown that it is not only men dominating migration patterns into the United States. Today there are entire families that are also undocumented immigrants (Donato and Armenta 2011; Hondagneu Sotelo 1994). Some suggest that this was a result of the militarization the border which put a halt on circular migration patterns and instead immigrants began to settle in the United States (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). As a result there are many families living in the United States. Some families are all of undocumented status while others are mixed-status families; families where maybe the parents are undocumented and the children are U.S. born citizens or where there are authorized immigrants and unauthorized immigrants within the same family (e.g. parents, siblings).

### **Immigration, Ethnicity, Race, & Illegality**

The first studies of immigration in the United States focused on the notion that Euro-American immigrants possessed “ethnic” identities. Immigrants, particularly Italians, Polish, Germans, etc. were said to experience nativism. “Race” and racism were understood as black-white relations and not as “American” and immigrant relations (Higham 1955; Ngai 2004). The assimilation paradigm marginalized issues of race and racism in immigration studies (Perea 1997). If immigrants were viewed as “unassimilable” then the onus was placed on immigrants not on the racist structure of society. Recent studies have focused on trying to understand the racialization of Asians and Latina/os. For instance, studies have focused on how Mexicans have been classified

in official, academic, and popular knowledge as unassimilable to American society (Ngai 2004).

Some immigration scholars have focused on ethnicity as their analytic of choice while others focus on race (Cornell and Hartmann 2007; Jiménez 2010). Both ethnicity and race get several critiques, including: 1) the tendency of essentializing these identities; 2) the ambiguous and unclear ways of articulating the differences within ethnic and racial communities; and 3) the omission and neglect of examining other social locations, such as gender amongst other social locations that impact identity formation and immigration incorporation.

Yet other scholars argue that we must highlight racism and white supremacy in our attempt to understand the experiences of immigrants of color (Haney Lopez 2006; Huber et al. 2008; Johnson 1999; Ngai 2004; Romero 2008a). Other scholars focus on “illegality” honing in on racist laws that have created, perpetuated, and exacerbated how immigrants and their communities (regardless of citizenship and nativity) are categorized as “illegals” and continue to face exclusion (De Genova 2004; 2005; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Romero 2008a).

The concept of illegality is often discussed and presented as a binary dichotomy, a black and white binary concept (Kubal 2013; Menjívar 2006; Yamamoto 2007). However the boundary between “legal” and “illegal” status is fluid and more complicated than it appears (Ackerman 2012). Migration is a complicated topic especially since the category of “immigrant illegality” changes depending on immigration laws and politics (Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Kubal 2013).

## **Segmented Assimilation Theory**

Segmented assimilation theory, an alternative model to the classical “mainstream” approach to assimilation forecasts a fragmented form of incorporation associated with divergent patterns for specific immigrant groups and their children (Portes and Zhou 1993). Segmented assimilation theory posits three trajectories of incorporation: (1) the acculturation and integration into white middle-class which leads to socioeconomic progress (Anglo-conformity); (2) an oppositional “downward assimilation” process into the impoverished “underclass”; and (3) the preservation of immigrant community’s values, culture, and solidarity, which leads to a more sheltered and supportive pathway to socioeconomic success. This pattern is thought to lead to the socioeconomic advancement of ethnic groups by sidestepping a mainstream assimilation trajectory (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Portes and colleagues have theorized that certain factors affect the incorporation process of immigrants and their children. For instance, they describe the relationships between children, parents, and the ethnic communities where immigrants reside to be critical components in conditioning which segment an immigrant will assimilate into. This is described as consonant, dissonant, and selective acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006).

Consonant acculturation results from experiences where parents and children gradually let go of their native language and culture to adopt the dominant U.S. culture and language. They both do this at the same rate. Consonant acculturation leads to Anglo-conformity or upward assimilation. Dissonant acculturation results when children

learn English and U.S. culture faster than their parents and adopt an adversarial culture of inner city youth. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue this can result in downward assimilation, and identify factors that may contribute to this negative trajectory, including racial discrimination, divergent labor markets, and nihilistic inner city culture (Waters et al. 2010, p. 2). Selective acculturation occurs when both children and parents learn U.S. culture and also remain embedded to their ethnic cultures. This results in delayed assimilation and biculturalism.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001; 2006) further develop segmented assimilation theory, although they keep the cultural component to their framework, by combining individual, group, and structural level processes. The structural level focuses on the contexts of reception (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). The contexts of reception refer to a group of factors affecting an immigrant group's mode of incorporation into the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). The most relevant contexts of reception are defined by "1) the policies of the receiving government; 2) the conditions of the host labor market; and 3) the characteristics of their own ethnic communities" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:92-93).

Segmented assimilation theory places an emphasis on the context of reception arguing that it shapes the structure of opportunities and intensifies the structural barriers immigrant groups encounter upon arrival (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). Segmented assimilation theory identifies several factors such as human capital, modes of incorporation, and family structure, as decisive in shaping how

immigrants and their children will incorporate into the host society (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006).

Segmented assimilation theory is indeed one of the most influential frameworks for the study of immigrant incorporation (Abrego 2011). However, like any other theory it has its critics. Assimilation is indeed a contested concept in contemporary society. It has been viewed negatively since the 1960s as an ethnocentric and condescending obligation on people of color. Its major critiques come from internal colonialism scholars (Blauner 1972; Almaguer 1994); critical race scholars (Bell 1992; Crenshaw 1991; Delgado and Stefanic 2001), and more specifically, LatCrit scholars (Romero 2008a; Johnson 1997). This dissertation mainly focuses on the major critiques from a CRT framework but more specifically from a LatCrit framework.

### **Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Race Theory**

Critical race scholars urge scholars to bring to the forefront how racism matters in people's lives. Critical race theory (CRT) allows the development of theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical approaches that take into consideration the role of race and racism and work toward eliminating racism (Solórzano and Yosso 2001). CRT shifts the researcher's lens away from viewing societal issues from traditional or mainstream research approach, one which normally holds people of color responsible for structural inequalities (Romero 2008a).

Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) moves away from the black/white binary paradigm which limits the understanding of a myriad of ways in which people of color continue to experience, challenge, and resist racism and other forms of subjugation



(Yosso 2005). LatCrit allows scholars to give voice to marginalized communities to show how dominant groups maintain privilege and power in the stratification system of the United States. LatCrit scholars acknowledge and push to the forefront how racism, sexism, classism, are experienced and highlight other forms of alleged inferiorities based on phenotype, culture, sexuality, surname, accent, and immigration status (Johnson 1999).

### **Critiques of Assimilation Research from LatCrit Scholars**

Assimilation researchers and other social scientists often conflate both race and ethnicity. Bonilla-Silva (1997) contends that previous studies of racism lack a structural theory. Therefore, he suggests adopting a structural theory of racism based on the idea of racialized social systems. The focus on ethnicity simply allows social scientists to focus on cultural attributes instead of racialization issues such as being stopped by police officers or ICE officials and being questioned for documentation of U.S. citizenship (Golash-Boza 2012). Romero (2008a) in *Crossing the Immigration and Race Border: A Critical Race Theory Approach to Immigration Studies* states eloquently:

Focusing on assimilation not only conceals white privilege; it also frames research questions away from examining racial, economic, and political privilege among Whites, ethnic Americans, and native and foreign-born groups of color. Consequently, policy recommendations generated from the focus on assimilation maintain the status quo, ignore White privilege, and set the agenda to disadvantage racialized groups further (p. 25).

Romero, a Latina critical race scholar, highlights a reality that has real-life consequences on immigrants and other people of color such as the maintenance of the status quo in policy recommendations. Huber and colleagues (2008) recognize the need and significance of critiquing assimilation through a LatCrit lens in conceptualizing the term

racist nativism. Some scholars argue that the distinction between foreign and native can easily be based on legal citizenship status (Huber et al. 2008).

Johnson (1997; 2002) explains post-1965 immigrants of color have been viewed as not assimilating into American society compared to earlier European groups. Moreover, he asserts that nativism is not determined by citizenship status but by the perception of who is native or “American.” This assertion supports that the power of nativism goes beyond citizenship status particularly by focusing on nativism (the distinction between native and foreign) allows natives to identify and oppress others based on their perceptions of being native.

Huber and colleagues (2008) argue that this distinction between native and foreign allows scholars to connect nativeness to nativism in the same influential way that they can relate white supremacy to racism – “by tracing the ‘symptom’ back to the ‘disease’.” Huber and colleagues further theorize the concept of “racist nativism” in an era marked by high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment. They argue that the legacy of white supremacy significantly informs racialized perceptions of what is considered a “white American identity”, whereby white Americans are perceived as native to the U.S. and all others as non-native.

They define racist nativism as the “assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is to be perceived white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites, or the natives, to dominance” (p. 43). Huber and colleagues (2008) conclude that undocumented Mexican immigrants suffer the most

violent forms of racist nativism, and legalized Mexican immigrants and even Chicana/os continue to be racialized as undocumented and therefore perceived as non-Americans.

Martinez (1999) suggests three main principles dominate the assimilation literature that requires people to: 1) abide by dominant norms or a core culture; 2) reject race consciousness; and 3) reject the equal value of cultures. These three main principles allude to the broader problematic implications that assimilation ideology models pose in examining immigration. Given these principles, assimilation encourages a meritocratic society, one which rewards individual achievement. This is problematic because it perpetuates a colorblind society and false assumption or myth of the American Dream that many immigrants buy into about the U.S. (Romero 2008a; Valdez 2011).

These notions are masked under the American Dream ideology which within itself is a colorblind racist ideology promoting meritocracy and individualism (Bonilla-Silva 2003; 2010; Romero 2008a; Valdez 2011). Additionally assimilation research focuses on a one-way level of assimilation and overlooks the value and sustainability of people of color. Assimilation theories emulate ethnocentric assumptions and promote white supremacy where White becomes normative (Johnson 1998). These critiques are meant for any assimilation framework including segmented assimilation theory.

### **Shortcomings of Segmented Assimilation Theory**

Overall, scholars adopting a segmented assimilation theoretical framework have generally focused on socioeconomic outcomes. For example, researchers have investigated the segmented assimilation trajectories of the Mexican-origin population by focusing on educational attainment (Abrego and Gonzalez 2010; Hirschman 2001), self-

employment outcomes (Valdez 2006; Valenzuela Jr. 2003), and labor force participation (Passel and Cohn 2010; Portes and Bach 1985), to name a few. In contrast, other scholars have argued the opposite; they suggest that Mexican immigrants and their children are indeed assimilating to the mainstream (Agius Vallejo 2012; Hirschman 2001; Jiménez 2010; Waldinger and Feliciano 2004; Waters et al. 2010). Research using a segmented assimilation framework to address the topic under investigation here – mental health – has been limited. Additionally, research focusing on the immigrant or later generations of the Mexican-origin population (beyond the second generation), has also been limited.

Although segmented assimilation theory has been empirically tested by investigating the incorporation processes of the second generation, it is necessary to also investigate how it plays out across the first and later generations (Waters et al. 2010). The absence of this research is due, in part, to the dearth of intergenerational longitudinal studies available. Telles and Ortiz's (2008) groundbreaking research provides an important corollary, as their findings contain both hopeful and disturbing implications for multiple generations of Mexican-origin people.

Telles and Ortiz (2008) find that Mexican Americans tend to reach linguistic assimilation yet are excluded from other social sectors. For example, they find that Mexican Americans remain in segregated neighborhoods; economic progress stops at the second-generation with later generations suffering from poverty rates; educational attainment peaks among the second-generation but declines among third or fourth

generations. This research underscores the importance of paying particular attention to generational status in explaining the incorporation process of Mexican immigrants.

In critiquing the segmented assimilation theory more specifically, scholars from this theoretical framework continue to shed culturally deficient traits to those “choosing” to remain in the “underclass.” Again, focusing on ethnicity and culture undermines the racialization experiences by immigrants post-1965 and second, third, etc. generation Latina/os. Although Portes and Rumbaut mention racial discrimination they fall short of critically analyzing Latinos as a racial group that experiences racism in the United States. Moreover, in critiquing their downward assimilation prediction of Mexicans and their offspring, they suggest that immigrants and their children who reside and adopt the Mexican American culture will downward assimilate. They do not consider or analyze the structural reasons which contribute to Mexican Americans living in those conditions and view downward assimilation as an individual choice.

Abrego (2011) and Menjivar (1999) build upon segmented assimilation theory and stress the importance of highlighting undocumented status as yet another barrier among many Latina/o immigrants. Valdez (2011) also critiques this framework and argues for an intersectionality approach in studying traditional forms of “ethnic entrepreneurship.” She shows how this literature primarily focuses on ethnicity (e.g. social capital and ethnic social networks) in facilitating immigrant business ownership.

Romero (2008b) pushes for the inclusion of citizenship status in intersectionality research and argues that unauthorized status is also socially constructed as anyone who appears to be “unauthorized” are often harassed by law enforcement and ICE officials.

Similarly, the work of Golash-Boza (2012) on raids, detentions, and deportations highlight the critical realities of how Latina/os, and even more so, dark Latina/os, are racialized and more prone to being questioned, detained, and deported than undocumented white European and even undocumented Asian immigrants. She also stresses a push towards viewing immigration from a human rights perspective.

This dissertation uses an intersectionality framework to study immigration. More specifically I argue that the intersectionality and immigration literatures should be bridged and the conflation of race and ethnicity in the assimilation research should be addressed. The intersectionality literature should also focus on legal status as yet another form of oppression. We need to highlight and incorporate studies focusing on the intersections of (race, ethnicity, class, gender, and legal status).

The ignored realities by immigration scholars who do not critically view the racialization process of immigrants of color needs to be addressed. The merging of these literatures will benefit both immigration and CRT scholarship. Additionally, research on the relationship between immigrant incorporation and health disparities is also lacking (Castro et al. 2010; Cook et al. 2009). Several scholars suggest that understanding immigrants' health and mental health outcomes are critical to fully understand the process of integration among immigrants in the U.S. (Joseph, 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). My research investigates this relationship from an intersectional approach.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality research emerged from multiracial scholars in feminist and women's studies. There are two overall approaches to intersectionality research. One

focuses on “particular positions of women of color” such as in the works of Essed, Crenshaw, Collins, and Harding. The other approach has been “constructed in more general terms, applicable to any grouping of people, advantaged as well as disadvantaged” such as Brah, Maynard, Anthias, and Yuval-Davis (Yuval-Davis 2009, p. 53). More specifically, seminal contributions in intersectionality theory come from Collins (2000) “matrix of domination,” “multiple jeopardy,” and Anzaldúa’s (1987) critique of patriarchy and misogyny along the Mexican-U.S. border, furthering the concept of “double-consciousness” for women.

The matrix of domination demonstrates the complexities of privilege as they operate in society. It contends that several forms of privilege (e.g. race, class, gender, sexual orientation) do not exist independent of one another but instead they are indeed related to one another. The multiple jeopardy concept emerged to better capture the interactive and multiplicative relationships social locations have on people. For instance, it builds upon double jeopardy and triple jeopardy by highlighting simultaneous oppressions some women face not solely as women, but perhaps from the effects of being a member of other marginalized social locations. Similarly, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa provides an avenue to further explore the intersections of identities and how they play out as forms of privilege or domination. These concepts briefly described also suggest the importance of focusing on legal status as yet another form of privilege or oppression.

An intersectionality perspective has been employed by researchers focusing on the U.S. labor market (Browne and Misra 2003); entrepreneurship (Valdez 2011); health

disparities (Schulz and Mullings 2006); law (Crenshaw 1991); families (Collins 2000); and immigration (Romero 2008b; Johnson 2004) among other interdisciplinary areas. Overall, an intersectional approach provides an avenue in which traditional methods of studying race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other social locations are challenged or questioned. It brings to the forefront the importance of viewing the intersections of all identities in explaining social phenomena. An intersectional approach allows scholars to highlight the oppressive experiences of marginalized groups and the privileged positions of dominant groups in society.

### **Intersectionality and Immigration**

Migration researchers have had reservations in the capability of its analytical scope and the applicability of its theoretical premises (Bürkner 2012). Migration scholars perceived intersectionality theory was limited to the focus on women migrants and to certain context of immigration. However, migration scholars today have adopted intersectionality as a way of explaining some of the fundamental problems of migration research: the reconciliation between structure and agency without promoting cultural essentialism (Bürkner 2012). An intersectionality approach pushes scholars to focus on the inextricably linkage of power within structures of inequality (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall 2013). Intersectionality “helps reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories” (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall 2013, p. 797).

Crenshaw’s seminal article (1991) provides an intersectional approach to identity, politics, and violence against women of color. Studying battered shelters in



communities of color in Los Angeles, Crenshaw highlights several important themes that contribute to immigration research and racial and ethnic relations research. Explicitly her findings highlight the vulnerability, exclusion, and fear in which immigrants lived coupled with domestic violence.

Specifically, she found immigrants encountered language barriers, limited access to intervention programs, and reluctance to leave abusive relationships for a fear of being deported. This contributed to these immigrant women prolonging domestic abuse choosing “protection against deportation” (p. 359). Findings as such have been documented in more contemporary research especially in an anti-immigrant climate and a mass-deportation era (Golash-Boza 2012; Sáenz, Menjívar, and García 2011). These findings suggest the importance of focusing on undocumented status as another social location which needs to be studied more critically from an intersectionality approach.

The works by Menjívar (1999) and Abrego (2011) also highlight undocumented status as yet another barrier Latina/o immigrants face. Similarly, Golash-Boza (2012) examines the lives of Latina/os impacted by immigration raids, detentions, and deportations by highlighting Latina/os, and even more so, dark Latina/os, as groups that are racialized. These groups are more prone to being questioned, detained, and deported when compared to white European undocumented and even Asian undocumented immigrants. Romero (2008b) highlights the significance of studying the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and citizenship. Her study finds that law enforcement and immigration officials racialize Latina/o immigrants as undocumented immigrants. Her findings suggest U.S.-born Mexicans (typically those with darker skin tones) are often

harassed and questioned by law enforcement officers. This shows the social construction of illegality. Valdez (2011) furthers the discussion by introducing an intersectionality approach to studying traditional forms of ethnic entrepreneurship. Specifically, she takes an intersectionality approach to examine how ethnicity (e.g. social capital and ethnic social networks) facilitates immigrant business ownership.

De Genova (2005) also conceptualizes migrant “illegality” and stresses for scholars to incorporate research on “the actual operations of immigration law in generating the categories of differentiation among migrants’ legal statuses” (p. 228). Haney Lopez (2006) has contributed to research connecting law, immigration, and race in his book: *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. Previous studies focusing on the undocumented Latina/o experience highlight the relevance of investigating how this group remains marginalized in a racialized and anti-immigrant society (Massey and Sánchez 2010).

Johnson (1995) addresses the importance of further researching the intersectionalities of immigration status, ethnicity, gender, class, and access to public benefits. He discusses the debate over the restriction of public benefits and services to undocumented immigrants and ties this to the long history of treating immigrants as outsiders and furthermore excluding them. He states the following regarding the importance of intersectional research “Independent analysis of each variable underestimates the magnitude of the problem. Viewed mathematically, subordination based on immigration status, ethnicity, gender, and class, is not simply the sum of the various components, but indeed may best be viewed as a multiple of them (p. 11).” It is

imperative to conduct research highlighting undocumented status as yet another layer needing further scrutiny and attention especially since immigrants to the U.S. are entering a racially stratified society (Donato and Armenta 2011).

By adopting an intersectionality approach to immigration, I am able to further demonstrate the complexity and nuances of these social locations viewing them from several levels of analysis and not simply dichotomous thinking such as authorized versus unauthorized. I am building upon the segmented assimilation theoretical framework by introducing another level of incorporation namely mental health outcomes. Furthermore, I complicate this further by examining the role of race and not simply ethnic identity as a marker of assimilation. Mexicans are a racialized group in the United States and experience racial microaggressions based on their unauthorized status. It is also critical to study the mental health of Mexican-origin women from an intersectional approach.

### **The Intersectionality of Illegality and Race**

Using an intersectionality perspective is crucial in highlighting the complexities associated with further understanding how legal status complicates race and ethnic relations today. By bringing attention to the multiple features of inequality, exclusion, and as well as other social locations like legal status, generation status, intersectionality theory helps to better understand the complexities associated with illegality and its broader impacts on the wider Latina/o communities (Abrego 2014). Intersectionality sheds light on the fluidity of illegality. It also provides an explanation to the major social determinants impacting the mental health outcomes of the Mexican-origin population by showing how the United States excludes certain groups.

## **The Importance of Highlighting Undocumented Status**

Melba J.T. Vasquez, the American Psychological Association past president of 2012, commissioned a report on the Presidential Task Force on Immigration. The report is the first comprehensive report dedicated solely to the topic of immigration undertaken by the American Psychological Association. The committee consisted of several world renowned psychologists and was chaired by Carola Suarez-Orozco. Given the dire political climate against Mexican immigrants and the demographic projections, Vasquez saw the need for a report that addresses the “psychological factors related to the experience of immigration” (p. 9). Yet psychologists are not the only ones interested in the mental health impacts of immigrants.

The study of immigrant health is indeed an interdisciplinary field. In addition to psychologists, other scholars like: economists, sociologists, public health, political scientists, educators, legal scholars, and many others have taken interest on the lives of the undocumented population and their health outcomes. Many studies on immigrant health are dominated by the acculturation paradigm (Horevitz and Organista 2012; Hunt, Schneider, and Comer 2004; Rogler et al. 1991; Rogler, Gurak, and Santana-Cooney 1987; Torres and Wallace 2013; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

Much of the literature written on immigration and health focuses on acculturation and its impact on the health of the immigrant population (Horevitz and Organista 2012; Hunt et al. 2004; Rogler et al. 1991; Rogler et al. 1987; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Although acculturation studies have contributed to the understanding of immigrant health, its primary focus on cultural determinants of health glosses over other factors related to the

migration experience (Escobar and Vega 2000; Hunt et al. 2004; Torres and Wallace 2013; Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). This focus ignores the structural barriers that are set within the U.S. social structure (Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012; Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson 2003).

By ignoring the structural barriers imposed on immigrants, this argument omits the responsibility of institutional systems and the impact of structural changes and policies on the health outcomes of immigrants (Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). Adopting an intersectionality perspective to interrogate health disparities is a useful framework that sheds light into new ways of showing how social structural barriers exacerbate health inequalities.

Acculturation studies on immigrant health also undermine the stressors associated with different forms of discrimination related to undocumented status, nativity status, and accent, in addition to the disproportionate access to healthcare and other social benefits (Berk and Schur 2001; Finch, Kolody, and Vega 2000; Kullgren 2003; Pérez, Fortuna, and Alegría 2008). Given these critiques of the acculturation paradigm, some scholars suggest moving towards a more extensive term “immigration-related stress” (Torres and Wallace 2013).

Immigration-related stressors cover various forms of discrimination including discrimination associated with illegality or presumed illegality. Additionally, immigration related stressors also cover pre-migration circumstances on post-migration psychological distress (Torres and Wallace 2013). It shows that the motivating and conditions associated with their migration has an impact on immigrants’ health once in

the host country (Torres and Wallace 2013). I agree with this approach to study immigrant health but I find intersectionality theory provides a more nuanced way of highlighting the power dimensions of multiple social locations and how these shape inequalities. Another dominant method of understanding immigrant health is through the Latina/o Health Paradox.

### **Latina/o Health Paradox and Mental Health**

Researchers have been exploring the concept of The Latina/o Health Paradox (also known as the Epidemiological Health Paradox) for the past three decades (Acevado-Garcia and Bates 2008; Sáenz and Morales 2012). The Latina/o Health Paradox alludes that Mexican immigrants fare better health than U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Markides and Coreil 1986; Markides and Eschbach 2005). The Latina/o Health Paradox has been researched across several health outcomes including: infant mortality (Hummer et al. 2007); low birth weight (Acevado-Garcia et al. 2007); psychiatric disorders (Alegría et al. 2007; Alegría et al. 2008; Vega et al. 1998); obesity (Barcenas et al. 2007); and adult mortality (Markides and Eschbach 2005; Palloni and Arias 2004). It is framed as a paradox because of Latina/os overall disproportionate low socioeconomic backgrounds, low educational outcomes, their minority status in the racial hierarchy, and because of their lack of health insurance, yet despite these barriers Latina/os are healthy (Sáenz and Morales 2012).

The Latina/o Health Paradox suggests Mexican immigrants have lower rates and lower risks of psychiatric disorders, including depression, than U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Finch et al. 2000; Vega et al. 1998). For example, the Los Angeles

Epidemiologic Catchment Area (LA- ECA) Study and the Mexican American Prevalence and Services Study (MAPSS) results demonstrate Mexican immigrants have lower rates of depression than U.S.-born Mexicans (Vega et al. 1998; Escobar 1998). These findings are also framed as an “immigrant paradox” and there are various hypotheses posed to explain the apparent paradoxical association between immigration status and psychiatric disorders.

Some scholars relate this paradox to the “healthy migrant” hypothesis suggesting the strongest and healthiest immigrants are the ones migrating to the U.S. (Aranda and Miranda 1997; Jasso et al. 2004; Palloni and Morenoff 2001). Moreover, the “salmon bias” hypothesis alludes to the underreporting of immigrants who are ill given they return to Mexico, therefore contributing to an underreporting of unhealthy immigrants (Palloni and Arias 2004). Some of these hypotheses also include: protective factors of strong and family cultural ties, acculturation, and theories of relative deprivation (Shrout et al. 1992). Golding, Karno, and Rutter (1990) have also documented differences in cultural expressions of distress. Other possible explanations for the better mental health profiles of Mexican immigrants include a perception of a lower set of expectations about what constitutes “success” in the U.S. (Escobar et al. 2000).

### **Disentangling the Latina/o Health Paradox**

The question some researchers have grappled with is in understanding the origins of the Latina/o Health Paradox (e.g. selection, causal, protective factors, reporting errors, etc.). The literature remains unsettled mainly due to the ambivalent nature in defining the paradox and limitations in comparable data. The Latina/o paradox is based on cross-

sectional data in the U.S. and this places limitations on the testing of possible explanations for the paradox.

Sáenz and Morales (2012) suggest conducting binational and longitudinal studies is needed in order to better capture the paradox. They suggest “longitudinal data that tracks immigrants and nonimmigrants in their country of origin, immigrants and native-born persons in the country of destination, and the ongoing movement of persons between the country of origin and country destination” (p. 64). This will lead to answers related to migrant selectivity as we will be able to compare migrants with those in their country of origin who did not migrate. Sáenz and Morales also suggest the need for longitudinal research designs and press future researchers to consider qualitative and ethnographic methods to unravel the Latina/o paradox.

### **My Approach**

I merge segmented assimilation and intersectionality theory to develop a new framework. My approach decenters the emphasis on ethnic group membership by bringing in other salient social group formations like race, class, and notably, legal status, to show how these distinct yet intersecting identities fuse to shape Mexican-origin women’s mental health outcomes in ways not fully considered in previous research. This dissertation brings new insights and directions to better understand the process of incorporation among disadvantaged populations. Moreover, as a qualitative researcher vested in Latina/o mental health disparities, I will move towards further investigating the complexities and nuances of the Latina/o paradox. I am wary of previous assumptions and will highlight “unauthorized status” which serves as a major impediment and



stressor in the lives of many unauthorized immigrants and their families. It is critical to highlight unauthorized status and other structural social locations that limit the opportunities and life chances of immigrants and their families.

### **An Intersectionality Approach to Studying Illegality and Mental Health**

I use an intersectionality approach in this dissertation to assist me in critically analyzing the ways in which undocumented immigrants face structural barriers based on their legal status and their racialized positions in the United States. McCall (2005) notes a division of doing intersectionality research. What she calls “inter-categorical” and “intra-categorical” divisions. According to McCall, some intersectionality studies have used either of these ways of doing intersectional research. Inter-categorical refers to the way the intersection of different social categories, such as race, gender, class, etc. affects specific social behavior or the distribution of resources. On the other hand, intra-categorical studies are those that complicate and problematize the meaning and boundaries of the categories themselves, and less concerned with the relationships among various social categories.

My dissertation aims to shed light on both inter and intra-categorical intersectionality. First, I am interested in the intersection of different social categories impacting Mexican-origin women, particularly, legal status, nativity, race, ethnicity, gender, and class and how these intersectional identities affect how Mexican-origin women are racialized and their impacts on mental health. Additionally, this study also is interested in an intra-categorical approach to intersectionality. This dissertation sheds light on the meaning of undocumentedness and what are the shifting boundaries of who

is considered “undocumented,” “alien,” or “immigrant” particularly in an anti-immigrant climate and during demographic transformations.

I focus on the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women because there is a dearth of sociological literature that describes the impacts on how undocumented status impacts their mental health. I focus on depression because it is the most likely diagnosed mental health disorder. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression. Some argue this is due to gendered manifestations that create more women to be diagnosed with it versus men. However, the association between gender differences, illegality, and mental health needs further research.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the links between being a member of a subordinate group (e.g. being a person of color) and worse health, education, income and wealth, etc. outcomes have been documented elsewhere (Brondolo, Gallo, and Myers 2009; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed, 2009; Williams and Sternthal, 2010). Previous studies have documented the experiences among people of color, discrimination, and mental health outcomes (Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed, 2009; Williams and Sternthal, 2010) but few studies have focused on anti-immigrant sentiment, the unauthorized population, and their mental health outcomes (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). Specifically, by investigating how unauthorized status can impact depressive symptoms this study expands the current scope of knowledge on unauthorized Mexican immigrant incorporation in the U.S.

This dissertation uses an intersectionality framework to study the relationship between legal status, nativity and mental health. I highlight the importance on focusing on legal status in the intersectionality literature as yet another form of oppression or privilege. By using an intersectionality framework, I incorporate studies focusing on the intersections of (race, ethnicity, class, gender, and legal status). Likewise, I hope to highlight the importance on showing how legal status is imbued with racial meaning (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) to immigration scholars. Moreover, I hope this study also shows how legal status also impacts the mental health and well-being of newcomers in the U.S. By using an intersectionality framework, my goal is to also contribute to the literature on health disparities, specifically mental health disparities.

I concur with scholars who argue towards examining structural level processes (such as unauthorized status) and how they limit the opportunities and life chances of immigrants (Donato and Armenta 2011). The precarious position of unauthorized status leads them to live their life with fear (Abrego 2011; Golash-Boza 2012; Sáenz et al. 2011) which leads to the deterioration of their mental and physical health (Sullivan and Rehm 2005; Joseph 2011). Therefore, it is critical to examine the impact a racialized and nativist context of reception has on immigrants entering the U.S., how they negotiate multiple sets of social locations (e.g. undocumented, women, etc.) given the increased levels of anti-immigrant sentiment (Massey and Sánchez 2010) and the impact these have on their mental health. It is critical to consider how the incorporation process affects immigrants' depressive symptoms.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

I adopt a qualitative research design to study depressive symptoms among Mexican-origin women across nativity and legal status. Qualitative methods have a theoretical foundation highlighting the contextual nature of knowledge (Maxwell 2005) and emphasize the process, meaning, and understanding of life experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Weiss 1995). A qualitative method approach provides me with the opportunity to capture the real lived experiences of Mexican-origin women focusing on incorporation processes, racism, and depression. These topics make up the substantive frame of my study.

Given that most mental health studies have been conducted via quantitative datasets, my study sociologically examines research questions using a qualitative approach in order to capture nuanced ways that Mexican-origin women experience a negative context of reception and depressive symptoms. I chose to conduct face-to-face interviews as the primary method of data collection because of my interest in learning and writing about women's experiences as Mexican-origin women residing in the United States. Face-to-face interviews also helped in putting the participants at ease and thus facilitated their sharing of experiences.

Given the vulnerability associated with undocumented status and the sensitive topics associated with living in an anti-immigrant racist society, as well as expressions of depressive symptoms, a qualitative method is the most appropriate. Moreover, given

the limited amount of quantitative studies on the undocumented population, particularly because of ethical reasons, qualitative methodologies provide a research design in which researchers can collect detailed narratives about sensitive topics. The information gathered sheds light on both the contexts of individual life histories as well as on the social contexts of their contemporary life circumstances in Houston, Texas.

### **Description of the Research Site**

Houston, Texas is the fourth largest urban city in the United States with a total population of 2,107,449 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey). The Hispanic or Latino population of any race makes up 917,133. Out of this population, the Mexican-origin makes up a total of 701,338. It is the largest subcategory among the Hispanic or Latino category. Women of all races make up 1,051,474 of the population residing in Houston, Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey).

Since the 1970s Houston has had significant growth of ethnic and racial populations (Rodriguez 1993; 1999). Houston is known as an enterprise city (Feagin 1988). It is home to one of the largest medical centers in the world, the port of Houston, oil businesses, and to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). It is also home to several universities and institutions of higher education. Houston has a booming economy and is attracting many people to it including Mexican-origin immigrants.

Given Houston's large Mexican-origin population, its close proximity to Texas A&M University, being a native Houstonian, and having conducted interviews in

Houston for my Master thesis, made this city more than ideal to pursue this research. It also demonstrates my engagement and familiarity with the research site. Being a native Spanish speaker and daughter of Mexican immigrants also demonstrates my insider knowledge to the community. This insider knowledge and connection to the women that participated in this study was beneficial towards establishing rapport (Madison 2005; Baca-Zinn 1979).

### **Data Collection**

Ninety Mexican-origin women from different neighborhoods in Houston, Texas were asked to participate in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. I first relied on family networks and my own knowledge of the communities to facilitate access to the population.

### **Description of the Sample**

The multi-stage data collection unfolded across several years throughout my graduate training. This dissertation study is an extension of research I conducted for my Master thesis. The first stage of the interviews took place in 2009-2010. During this stage of the research, I interviewed thirty Mexican immigrant women to capture how unauthorized status impacts their mental health. My dissertation includes the experiences of thirty undocumented Mexican immigrant women, thirty documented Mexican immigrant women, and thirty Mexican American women for a total of ninety interviews. The dissertation interviews took place during February 2013 through December 2013. The ages of the women ranged from 23 and 68. My study was open to all Mexican-origin women, 18 years and older residing in the Houston area.

The first category focuses on the undocumented Mexican immigrant women. From this population I have three subcategories of women: 1) women who entered the U.S. with a visa or permit who overstayed it and consequently became undocumented; 2) women who entered the U.S. clandestinely; and 3) women who are the 1.5 generation indicating they entered the U.S. clandestinely at a young age. In the documented Mexican immigrant women category, I also have three subcategories including: 1) women who entered the U.S. with legal documents; 2) women who entered the U.S. clandestinely but were able to legalize their status; and 3) the 1.5 generation. Finally in the third category, I interviewed U.S.-born Mexican American women. I have various generational statuses ranging from second-generation to over fourth generation U.S.-born Mexican Americans. This is illustrated in the table below:

**Table 1: Description of Sample Subcategories**

<b>Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women</b>	<b>Documented Mexican Immigrant Women</b>	<b>U.S.-born Mexican American Women</b>
Entered U.S. with visa or permit	Entered the U.S. with legal documents	Second generation
Entered U.S. clandestinely	Entered the U.S. clandestinely but were able to legalize their status	Third generation
1.5 Generation	1.5 Generation	Fourth generation +

These subcategories vary across nativity and legal status. Specifically, for the foreign-born population, the forms of entry into the United States varied across participants. For example, fifteen women entered the United States clandestinely either crossing the river, the desert, or using false documentation. The remaining fifteen

participants entered the U.S. with some form of permit, mainly tourist visas. It is critical to note that the women who were able to obtain a legal way of entering the U.S. were born and lived in border states such as Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua.

The women who were once undocumented and are now documented, were able to share their experiences retrospectively on what living as an undocumented person meant for them. Having previously lived as undocumented immigrants, these women were able to describe and compare their experiences pre and post legalization. I also asked questions about their children, to learn more about mixed-status families, or families that have both undocumented and documented family members.

The interviews tapped into the contexts of reception and the different challenges Mexican-origin women face as they incorporate into U.S. society. These sub-categorical differences are vital to note because when researchers write about undocumented immigrants, it is crucial to disentangle the complexities in their experiences and not simply lump undocumented immigrants into one category. In other words, the undocumented experience varies and is therefore not homogenous.

Similarly to the contexts of reception in which immigrants find themselves in, distinguishing between modes of entry can also play a role in their incorporation process (Portes and Rumbaut 2006) and depressive symptoms expressed by participants. Furthermore, it is critical to disentangle these subcategories because their incorporation experiences can be theoretically different contingent upon women's current status as well as previous statuses. For example, the undocumented 1.5 generation also have



different life experiences than first-generation undocumented immigrants (Abrego 2011; Gonzalez 2011).

### **Recruitment**

Using my personal knowledge and family networks, I began recruitment by using the fieldnotes and contacts I had built from my Master thesis. I re-contacted some of the women that were interviewed for the thesis and informed them about the continuation of my study. I explained the characteristics of the women I was hoping to interview. They suggested women that fit the criteria and may be interested in being interviewed. It was through my established connections that I was able to gather a snowball sample. Women, who agreed to participate in the study, eventually led me to other interviewees, who in turn, led me to others as well.

By using this snowball sampling technique, I was able to expand variability in the sampling design (Merriam 2009; Maxwell 2005). In addition to snowball sampling, I recruited participants through purposive sampling, a nonrandom method used to recruit participants with specific characteristics in mind (Merriam 2009; Maxwell 2005). In order to get a more complete representation of these women's experiences within the context of adjusting to life in the United States, I used purposive sampling to recruit participants who had specific characteristics such as women of Mexican-origin but born in the U.S. and Mexican immigrant women with a legal immigration status.

One participant, who served as a key informant, suggested sending an e-mail to members of an organization that maintains a listserv. She asked me if she could forward a message about my study to the listserv. I graciously agreed and soon after my e-mail

inbox filled up with interested women residing all over the city of Houston. After replying to their e-mails, I set up interviews with interested women. Once the interview was complete, I would ask for referrals of other women who would be interested in participating. There was a time in which I did not need to ask anymore since I had an overwhelming number of women contacting me via e-mail. It was mainly U.S.-born Mexican American women or women who were born in Mexico but entered the U.S. at a young age, also known as the 1.5 generation, which contacted me via e-mail. Among these women, one is undocumented.

In order to recruit from a variety of places I also attended different events around the city of Houston. These ranged from frequenting places that cater to the Mexican population in the city. For example, I attended church services, theater and arts programs promoting Mexican and Latina/o culture, restaurants, and festivals. Through these events I would often meet women who agreed to be interviewed. I would introduce myself to them and would inform them of the dissertation study. I would get their contact information so that I could call them at a later time to schedule an interview.

Some participants would also invite me to attend events with them and often introduced me to their own networks. Some of the events I attended include: *jaripeos*, film festivals, museums, concerts, and even went out dancing *norteño* and *banda* music. I delightfully and excitedly attended a *Los Tigres del Norte*, one of my favorite bands, concert with one of the participants. Other events I attended include children's baptisms and birthday parties.

Depending on the times interviews were scheduled, some participants invited me to join their family for different home-cooked meals. For others, regardless of the time during the day, they insisted on us having coffee, *pan dulce*, or *tortillas con mantequilla*. For example, Doña Cuca, 63 years old, born in the state of Guanajuato, and now a naturalized U.S. citizen, insisted on making me *tortillas* and at least having one *tortilla con mantequilla*. She insisted I sit down and watch her *estender las tortillas* as she placed them on the *comal* while they cooked. She had the *testales* placed in a container in her refrigerator. Of course I could not turn down these homemade tortillas which were prepared with endearment and careful detail. They were delicious!

Doña Cuca also gave me a walking tour of her home. During our interview, she had described the debilitated conditions the house was first in when her and her husband purchased their home. She proudly retold each step of the transformation and rebuilding her and her husband did to their home. Among these transformations, she had an extended kitchen that had a custom made table that sits 12 people. I was very impressed. The table was custom made and sits her 9 children (with her youngest daughter being 24). She also showed me one of her most favorite places of their home, a sanctuary room full of flowers, plants, religious saints, and altars for family members that have passed. Among them was *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Doña Cuca described how she enjoys spending time in this sacred space. It is in this sacred space that Doña Cuca copes with her worries. She prays, cries, and *se desahoga*, remaining hopeful for a better tomorrow.

From all the women I contacted, which had been referred to me by other participants, or had contacted me via e-mail, I only had two women who initially agreed

to participate but did not follow-up with me. I also had a few women re-schedule our interview due to sickness, work, or family emergencies. One woman did not return my calls or e-mails for over two weeks. Fortunately she returned my call once she was out of the hospital after having surgery. She apologized for not getting back to me sooner. We set up a time to meet for the interview. Since we did not finish the entire interview, we had to re-schedule a time to complete the remainder of it. This also occurred with two other participants that were unable to complete the interview given time constraints. Taking this unanticipated break actually helped them reflect even more on the interview. When I met for the follow-up and final portion of the interview, they often hinted at previous answers and delved deeper into the topics we had previously discussed in the interview. Some women also sent me additional material via e-mail or would text or call me with information they forgot to mention in the interview.

### **The Interviews**

The interviews that took place in the summer or winter breaks (when I was not teaching or taking courses) were conducted solely based on the participants' schedules to accommodate their most convenient time. Interviews that were conducted during the months while I was teaching or taking courses were scheduled on the weekends or on my days off. This entailed a lot of driving to and from College Station and Houston, TX.

Interviews took place at participants' preferred locations. This often involved their homes. Other times I met participants at a coffee shop or at a restaurant of their choosing. Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English and sometimes mixtures of both languages. Interviews lasted between 1 to 5 hours.

I responded to people that contacted me via e-mail by first thanking them for their interest in participating in my study. Next, I would ask them for their preferred dates and location to conduct the interviews. Some preferred to make these arrangements over the phone and would ask me to call them. Others communicated via e-mail until the day of our interview. Women that were referred to me through participants, I would call them and introduce myself by stating my name and the person who recommended me to them. Then I would continue to describe my dissertation project and ask if they would be interested in participating. Once they agreed, we made the proper arrangements to schedule the interview.

Once arriving at our interview location I would first thank them for agreeing to participate. At first we would make small talk regarding anything from the weather to current events. I then proceeded to review the IRB approved Information Sheets with them. These sheets provided a brief description of the study, information on their rights as participants, guaranteed confidentiality, and my contact information (View Appendix A given to Mexican immigrant women and B given to Mexican American women).

I also told them that if they felt uncomfortable at any time of the interview they have the right to stop the interview. Additionally, I informed them that if they did not feel comfortable answering a question; they have the right not to answer it. I made sure they understood their rights as participants and allowed them ample time to ask questions before getting started.

After reviewing the information sheets and answering any questions or concerns, the interview began with demographic questions ranging from education, birth date,

marital status, employment status, earnings, and migration history, etc. (View Appendix C for Mexican immigrant women and D for Mexican American women). Once this information was collected, the actual interview began following an interview guide with open-ended questions (view Appendix E for Mexican immigrant women and F for Mexican American women).

The interview questions ranged depending on the different nativity and legal status categories of the women. For example, for those that are foreign-born, I asked questions about their migration experience and family relations. For those that are U.S.-born, I asked questions about their families migration experiences. All women were asked questions covering topics such as incorporation experiences, anti-immigrant sentiment, and discrimination.

Questions were also asked to capture their views on depression and coping mechanisms, i.e. support groups or networks they maintain or who they turn to for assistance in dealing with difficult life experiences. I also asked about their current feelings related to immigration reform, violence in Mexico, and how these issues affect their current lives. In addition, I asked about their future plans. The interviews ended with an opportunity to have participants reflect on any part of the interview or to add anything they felt was important that was not addressed in the interview. Finally participants were asked to complete two scales that measure depressive symptoms. One is the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression scale (CES-D) and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9).

The CES-D is the most commonly used measure for depression (Finch et al. 2000). It is used for research purposes and is easily administered, has high validity and reliability, and is easily accessible to the public (Radloff 1977). The CES-D is a self-report 20-item scale that measures depressive symptoms during the period one-week prior to when the instrument was administered. Responses to each question range from 0-3 and the total scores range from 0-60.

The interview ended with the completion of the PHQ-9. The PHQ-9 was developed in the mid-1990s to assist clinicians in the primary care setting in detecting depressive symptoms. It is useful for screening, diagnosing, monitoring, and measuring the severity of depression (Kroenke, Spitzer, and Williams 2001). The PHQ-9 is a self-report 9-item scale that captures depressive symptoms criteria of the DSM-IV during the period of two-weeks prior to when the instrument was administered. It is a Likert-type scale scoring between 0 as (not at all) to 3 as (nearly every day). Total scores range from 0-27. Scores of 5, 10, 15, and 20 represent mild, moderate, moderately severe, and severe depression (Kroenke et al. 2001). My dissertation study focuses on the qualitative data.

Once the interview concluded, participants were given a \$20.00 cash incentive for their time and participation. Studies have shown that providing incentives to research participants actually improves response rates without compromising the quality of the data or the integrity of the research (Singer et al. 1999). Others suggest providing incentives does not impact the quality of the interviews. Weiss (1995) suggest if

participants are of low-income then providing incentives can be a plus particularly because of their economic need.

Although I am cognizant that the amount was quite small for the amount of data they provided me, I made the conscious choice of paying participants because I personally felt obligated to provide an incentive to engage in reciprocity and show my appreciation. I provided cash incentives for all data collection phases of my study including the interviews I collected for my Master thesis. I worked very hard to secure research grants to be able to pay participants and also saved some fellowship money for research purposes.

I do not feel that providing this incentive made participants more or less willing to share information throughout the interview. I do believe that perhaps this incentive made people more likely to participate in my study. I had some women which refused to take the money but once I explained that I had applied for research funds to pay them, they accepted the incentive.

Using both the interviews and measurement scales worked to fully understand the participant's experiences with depression. The importance of having conducted face-to-face interviews with participants was to reflect both cultural content and social context of mental health problems that they may have encountered. Interview questions were designed to generate detailed narratives on women's life histories. Therefore, questions were open-ended and semi-structured.

By using a semi-structured interview approach, it entailed developing a series of key topics and questions to be covered in all of the interviews (Weiss 1995). However,



the wording and order of the questions followed individual women's preferred narrative style. This approach allowed participants to speak on the same general topics but provided me the flexibility to probe and expand discussions as necessary, while enabling new themes to emerge (Weiss 1995).

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using a multi-step analytical process based on fieldnotes and interview transcripts (Burawoy et al. 1991; Fetterman 1998; Glaser and Strauss 1999). With verbal consent by research participants, all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. All participants agreed to be recorded. Students were hired as Research Assistants (RAs) to help with transcriptions and translations. Interviews conducted in Spanish were transcribed verbatim in Spanish and analyzed in Spanish. The RAs assisted in the transcription and translation of data. I developed a "back translation" strategy to check translations in order to ensure reliability (Merriam 2009).

Triangulation was established by: 1) using the CES-D and PHQ-9 scales to gauge depressive symptoms; 2) the hiring of two RA; 3) the multiple sources of data – those from interview transcripts and fieldnotes (Denzin 1978); and 4) use of member checks. To ensure validity and reliability, member checks also known as respondent validation were conducted with some respondents (Merriam 2009) to get feedback on emerging findings. The reasoning in doing this is to ensure my preliminary analysis adequately captures the experiences expressed by respondents and to lessen the possibility of misinterpreting data (Maxwell 2005).

Data collection and analysis were done simultaneously throughout the research process. Once interviews were transcribed verbatim, I engaged in a systematic process of analysis. My primary goal of doing this was to determine a set of common themes and patterns from the women's interviews. This data condensation refers to the "process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014 p. 12).

Data condensation occurred since the initial stages of the research design and continued throughout the research data collection and analysis phases. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggest data condensation is an ongoing process in qualitative research. For example, data condensation occurs as the substantive frame, research questions, and interview guides of the study are finalized. As I interviewed women, data condensation, occurred through my write ups of fieldnotes, summaries, and analytic memos. Data condensation occurred from the conceptual stages to the final stages of writing this dissertation.

To describe common themes across the interviews, I conducted careful and detailed readings of transcriptions and fieldnotes to gain a better understanding of the range of information contained in the interviews. Through these initial readings, I developed a coding system (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The coding themes were informed by both the research questions proposed at the onset of the study as well as the careful and detailed readings of the interview transcriptions and fieldnotes. Since I had three major categories (e.g. undocumented, documented, and Mexican American

women), and several subcategories, I analyzed each major category first to identify certain themes. Once I had all the themes, varied by nativity and legal status categories, I was able to compare and contrast their experiences.

My study also adopts an extended case method (ECM) strategy which highlights “how the social situation is shaped by external forces, or, in the terms of C. Wright Mill’s sociological imagination, tries to connect “the personal troubles of the milieu” to “the public issues of social structure.” (Burawoy et al. 1991, p. 6). ECM attempts to elaborate the effects of the “macro” on the “micro.” The main goal of the ECM is its focus on what theory fails to explain. Hence, the limitations of the theory serve as grounds for reconstruction (Burawoy 1998).

Using the ECM technique, I was able to better explain any inconsistencies I found in preexisting theories. Through this technique, I connect macro level structural problems such as those found in a negative context of reception to the micro everyday experiences of Mexican-origin women. More specifically, I am able to connect how larger social structural issues impact individual’s mental health outcomes.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

My dissertation explores immigration from an intersectional approach and is limited to mainly focusing on nativity and legal status as social locations. This is mainly a result of time and data collection costs associated with collecting original qualitative research. Future research will be extended to also include an analysis of men so I can highlight differences across gender, legal status, nativity, and other social locations. Although this is a limitation, the overall contribution to intersectionality theory is the

focus on unauthorized status as another social location that exacerbates other marginalized social locations.

This dissertation study, research questions, and design evolved from the Master thesis. My Masters focused on interviewing Mexican undocumented immigrant women investigating how this status impacts their mental health outcomes, focusing on depressive symptoms. My dissertation builds on this study by adding the experiences of documented Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican American women. I build on my Masters to examine how nativity and legal status impact depressive symptoms.

I was unsure about interviewing undocumented men and then comparing their gender differences or if to continue focusing on women and instead comparing legal status and nativity. I decided to continue interviewing women since I wanted to better understand issues related to legal status and nativity. The experiences of men will be a future study post-dissertation. A more detailed and thorough discussion on the limitations and future research of this study is discussed in Chapter VIII: Conclusion and Policy Recommendations.

### **Rationale for Pursuing this Study: Intellectual Motivations**

My intellectual motivations are fueled by my personal motivations. Social science research methods textbooks outline several ways researchers decide and plan out their research agendas. Some indicate that researchers may often be moved by further understanding their personal experiences or their own childhoods (Cole 2001). Other avenues that stimulate research agendas may stem from identifying the gaps in the

literature and theoretical contributions (Maxwell 2005). Yet other ways students can choose a research topic is linked to their professors/advisors research projects.

Some scholars are critical of those that pursue research agendas that are motivated by personal experiences. For instance, Cole (2001) writes in his edited book titled: “What’s Wrong with Sociology?”: “...A sociologist, for example, might select a problem because of the biographical experiences that he or she has had... The problem with selecting topics for research based upon non-cognitive criteria is that it reduces the chances that the results of the research will be important in answering any scientific theoretical questions” (p. 51). As a female researcher of color that values personal experiences as epistemological ways of knowledge production I find Cole’s position on this issue problematic.

Providing a voice and adequate picture of the inequalities that marginalized communities have faced in the United States is an important scientific contribution, one which critical race and feminist scholars highly value. I agree that we need to select research agendas that will contribute and advance scientific theoretical questions. However, having a personal connection to our research and being insider researchers, I argue serves to motivate and keep a researcher passionate about our work.

In addition to using my personal story as a motivation for this research, I am also moved by my intellectual curiosity to further study this phenomenon from a critical perspective. More importantly, the notion of discounting personal experiences as legitimate motivations for research sends a larger message. It minimizes the research

conducted by scholars that have used their personal experiences as motivations for their research agendas.

C. Wright Mills call to develop our sociological imaginations by researching “how the private troubles of individuals, which occur within the immediate world of experience, are connected to public issues and to public responses to these troubles” provides a platform for researchers to study topics connecting their own biographies to public troubles (Denzin 2010 p. 9). As Denzin calls in his book entitled: *The Qualitative Manifesto: A Call to Arms* researchers must not only interpret and write about society but must engage in social justice and help change society. He writes:

“The social sciences... should be used to improve the quality of life... for the oppressed, marginalized, stigmatized and ignored... and to bring about healing, reconciliation and restoration between the researcher and the researched” (Stanfield, 2006, p. 725, cited by Denzin 2010, p. 9).

I align with those scholars who see the value in investigating questions that may stem from researchers personal experiences and hence engage in insider research (Baca Zinn 1979; Rios 2011). Moreover, I align with scholars who engage in research with a goal of improving the lives of those we “study.” Insider research is used to describe research studies where the researchers have a connection with the participants. This can be based on different social locations or experiences. Insider research is often critiqued by scholars that argue insider researchers “subjectivity” leads to biases in data gathering, analysis, and interpretations (Baca Zinn 1979). It is sometimes disregarded and considered invalid and unscientific.

In *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies* (2000), Gallagher discusses racial matching between researcher and

participants. He pinpoints how white researchers are not critiqued for studying other whites or people of color. This invisibility serves as a way to mask whiteness and only serves to perpetuate white privilege.

Following this same logic, whites have been studying other whites for centuries and no one critiques their research as being unscientific. In fact, on the opposite end of the spectrum, white scholars that have studied communities of color are often praised for their research. More specifically, white ethnographers are oftentimes praised for obtaining access into “marginalized” communities especially as outsider researchers. I find this unequal praise offensive for scholars of color that are passionate about the inequalities they have experienced first-hand as insiders into a world that privileged scholars can “borrow” and “temporarily” live through their data collection and research.

Towards the goal of contributing to scientific theoretical questions and validating my own personal experiences as legitimate, I focus on how an unequal social structure impacts the lives of Mexican-origin women. My training as a sociologist has provided an avenue to study the following research questions for this dissertation study:

- (1) In the context of a negative societal reception, how does illegality shape Mexican-origin women’s mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?
- (2) How do intersectional identities rooted in race, ethnicity, class, legal status, and nativity coupled with a negative societal reception, affect Mexican-origin women’s mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?

### **Standpoint Epistemology**

These questions are answered through a qualitative research design. My research adopts a standpoint epistemology tradition. Standpoint theory is a feminist critical theory

focusing on the relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding 2004; Smith 1990). Emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, standpoint theory has both critics and supporters, which use it as a “method of research,” an epistemology, and a political strategy adopted by feminist researchers (Harding 2004; Smith 1990).

Standpoint epistemology recognizes and emphasizes one’s social position or “situatedness” in society. It takes the opposite approach of traditional epistemology and argues that one’s situatedness can be understood in a favorable light. More specifically, this approach argues that people who have been oppressed or marginalized have what it takes to criticize the basics in both scientific and political realms in ways that others cannot.

Standpoint theory is helpful to use especially in highlighting the ways in which immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican American women experience the United States not only given their race, ethnicity, nativity status, legal status, but also as women. I argue that having personal insights to this research further enhances my analytical skills, which not only facilitates access to the research population, but also allows me the ability to analyze data in ways that other colleagues who do not have such experiential knowledge can obtain.

I am also motivated to undertake this study given the current anti-immigrant sentiment that permeates today’s society. I want to put a face to immigration and tell the stories of these women and their families. Both immigration and mental health are two highly contested public policy topics especially today. Therefore, this also motivates my research. The lack of critical theories in explaining health disparities among the



Mexican-origin population also motivates my study. I am interested in focusing in on undocumented status as another important indicator to health disparities and stratification.

### **My Personal Motivation & Passion: Bringing Emotions to the Forefront**

I close this chapter by discussing my positionality and personal motivations for pursuing this research. This is followed by a brief discussion on researcher reciprocity and the commitment towards conducting research where both the researcher and researched benefit in a reciprocal exchange. I end by discussing the emotional labor prompted by undertaking a qualitative study that I am deeply passionate about. Given that in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Maxwell 2005; Merriam 2009), it is vital to discuss my positionality, motivations, reciprocity, and the emotional labor endured throughout the entire research process.

### **Positionality**

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies plays a major part throughout the research process. Some of these roles include collecting data and serving as the research instrument (Maxwell 2005; Merriam 2009; Miles et al. 2014). Therefore, data are viewed through the lens of both the participants and the researcher analyzing the data. It is necessary for researchers to acknowledge their background and positionality as they carry out their research projects (Lincoln 1995; Parker and Lynn 2002). Recognizing one's positionality is critical because it forces researchers to understand and recognize their own power, privileges, and biases (Madison 2005).

Indeed, it is vital for researchers to begin their research endeavors by first asking: who am I? Madison (2005) writes: “The experiences in your life, both past and present, and who you are as a unique individual will lead you to certain questions about the world and certain problems about why things are the way they are” (p. 19). Lincoln (1995) questions qualitative researchers about discussing criteria for quality interpretive research. She discusses the importance of researcher’s positionality and the community as a way of judging the research study’s capacity to meet validity standards (Parker and Lynn 2002).

Being aware of my positionality helped me remain focused in accomplishing the end result of this research project. My positionality helped shape my research agenda and I continuously remained reflexive on my personal insights that I bring to the academy and research projects. My personal experiences allowed me the necessary theoretical and analytical lens to better study this population.

Experiencing first-hand many injustices my parents and family encountered in various social institutions, helped me to better understand these women’s experiences. These life experiences provide me the ability to analyze certain situations that may be looked over by white or privileged researchers. Therefore, my personal experiences and insights allow me the ability to read, live, and analyze data in such a way that other researchers and academicians only develop theories and publish. Having both the academic and street knowledge has worked to my benefit in this research endeavor. Moreover, as a second-generation bilingual and bicultural Mexican American woman, I have the sensitivity and the personal knowledge to explore and understand the nuanced

lived experiences of Mexican-origin women. This leads me to discuss in more detail my personal motivations for this study.

### **Personal Motivations**

I was motivated to study the experiences of Mexican-origin women and their mental health outcomes across legal status and nativity from my own personal experiences. I am the proud daughter of Mexican immigrants and grew up in a segregated *barrio* in Houston, TX. My mother lived in the United States as an undocumented woman for several years. She had a total of eight children. The oldest four were born in Mexico. The last four of her children were born in the United States. I am the youngest of the eight children.

When my mother migrated to the United States she brought her eldest son and youngest daughter and left two behind in Mexico. As a little girl I longed to hear my mother's stories about her experiences in Mexico and her decisions to migrate to the U.S. She often painted a rosy picture of this experience and it was not until I was much older that I learned of the many injustices she faced throughout her life.

Growing up we did not visit Mexico. As a young child I was not sure why but we often had an uncle or male cousins from Mexico living with us. I still recall when my mother went to Juarez, Mexico for several days. I was too young to understand that going to Juarez could potentially result in good. Her papers were fixed. She was able to legalize her status through my father who had legal documents to be in the United States.

Those days are vividly imprinted in my memories. I missed her and did not comprehend why she had to go to Juarez. Soon after her return, my parents planned our

trip to Mexico. We had one vehicle which was not the most reliable car. Luckily, my father was a self-employed mechanic so although it would leave us stranded, he always fixed it. The preparation for this trip was on its way to becoming a reality. All the clothes my mom had stored were being stuffed into the car and even on a camper. It was all going to Mexico for my relatives.

I still vividly recall the day my parents picked me up from school and off we were to Mexico! Unfortunately our car broke down one night. My mother had packed blankets that she laid below a tree and we slept outside right near our car. The next day my father, with the help of some locals, was able to fix the car and off we were again on our way to Durango, Mexico. We eventually made it to Nicolas Romero, Durango: the *rancho* my mother was born. I did not have the ability to understand the reasoning why we never visited Mexico but I knew that my mother was very happy to see her family. I was seven years old.

### **Reciprocity**

My personal story, highly motivated by paying tribute to my parents and mother in particular, fuels my interest in immigration and mental health. Although this study is fueled by personal passion coupled with intellectual motivations, it is equally methodologically and theoretically rigorous.

My personal story and interest in my dissertation topic was sometimes questioned by the women I interviewed. Some even inquired about my interest in immigration and more specifically in understanding the experiences of women. Revealing some of my personal story was reassuring for them. Some participants even

admired my interest in further understanding the experiences of Mexican immigrant women especially since I was born in the U.S.

The Mexican American women I interviewed also seemed to be interested in further documenting the experiences of Mexican American women in the U.S. especially in today's anti-immigrant climate. All participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss their personal stories and to shed light on a topic that is not often discussed as openly but is relevant in our communities: mental health. The following quotes are from some of the women I interviewed:

*"Well I think it is important to help people that really need it... like helping them get better emotionally and providing a way for them to realize that they can be more than housewives, mothers of children, and make them realize that they have opportunities to overcome their difficulties. Like helping them establish their identity. For example, many of us are frustrated here... but we do not have support. Many of us are lost."*  
(Monica, 28 years old)

*"I didn't expect to get all teary eyed because I guess these are things that you just stop thinking about over the years you don't even think about it. You know it's there but you don't discuss it. But I think it's cool I can't wait to hopefully read about it [this dissertation study] at some point. That would be exciting."*  
(Jazmin, 28 years old)

*"Hope you had an excellent thanksgiving and the project you were working on got to be a great success. Just wanted to give you an update on my life and ask you to please send your positive thoughts my way since this Tuesday I will be having my interview. After almost 20 years my wait may be over. The number finally came up and I'm being called. I'm very hopeful that all will go well and I can finally be free. Thanks so much for listening. I felt happy to know someone out there is gathering our experiences and making them known."*  
(Rita, 32 years old, emailed on 11/28/2013)

Many of the women I had the pleasure in interviewing described the importance of having their stories documented and validated. My hope is to do them justice by bringing their experiences to the forefront of academic and public policy debates. Some

of the women also questioned what would be the end result of my findings. For instance, Raquel, a Mexican American woman that married an undocumented Mexican man, asked me:

*“Juanita, you are collecting all these interviews and stories and it’s really good. I can tell you are passionate but in the end what will happen with your interviews, your findings? ... Once you finish school, where will you work? ... What do professors do exactly? If I need help with something about court or the law, I call a lawyer, if I’m sick, I call a doctor, what can I call you for?”*  
(Raquel, 49 years old)

These questions that Raquel asks get at the heart of the unequal and exploitative relationships of the research enterprise. Blauner and Wellman (2001) argue that research serves to continue the subservience of people of color while perpetuating the privileged status of social scientists. They argue this is also true for social scientists of color studying communities of color because as academics there is a direct benefit to their academic and professional advancement. They write:

The control, exploitation and privilege that are generic components of social oppression exist in the relation of researchers to researched, even though their manifestations may be subtle and masked by professional ideologies... Exploitation exists whenever there is a markedly unequal change between two parties, and when this inequality is supported by a discrepancy in social power. In social research, subjects give up some time, some energy, and some trust, but in the typical case get almost nothing from the transition. As social scientists, we get grants which pay our salaries; the research thesis legitimates our professional status, then publications advance us along in income and rank, further widening the material and status gap between the subjects and ourselves. (176-177).

The questions that Raquel posed to me were questions that I first asked myself as an undergraduate student involved in research through the McNair Scholars program and the Summer Research Opportunity Program. My plan was to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociology and diversify the academy by joining the ranks of professors of color.

Throughout my graduate training I continued to grapple with these same questions that Raquel raised. I remain engaged in the academy because my goal is to conduct and teach others to conduct research that will positively impact the communities we study. I am passionate to join scholars who encourage reciprocity and highlight the importance of being reflexive researchers.

Reciprocity in research signifies the belief that researchers and participants are involved in “give-and-take” where both parties benefit and hence establish equality (Huisman 2008; Lather 1986; Maiter et al. 2008). Obtaining reciprocity between researcher and participants is interlinked with the value of reflexivity. To be reflexive means researchers must reflect about issues of power and positionality throughout the entire research process (Huisman 2008). My goal was to establish reciprocity between the participants of this study. I also remained aware and reflexive about my own positionality, privilege, and power in this project.

### **Emotional Labor**

The highly influential work written by Kleinman and Copp (1993) brings emotions to the forefront of fieldwork. They state:

Field researchers learn – through their teachers, texts, and colleagues – how to feel, think, and act. As members of the larger discipline, fieldworkers share a culture dominated by the ideology of professionalism or, more specifically, the ideology of science. According to that ideology, emotions are suspect. They contaminate research by impeding objectivity, hence they should be removed (1993, p. 2).

Emotions are silenced out of research and more so if it is quantitative research.

However, emotions add much more to the research process and should not simply be ignored.

I knew that the research I chose to pursue would arouse emotions such as frustration and sadness. But I never realized how my research topic would reveal deeper melancholic feelings as a result of my mother's unexpected death. I lost my mother December 2011 after she was diagnosed with gallbladder cancer in November 2011.

My mother had been very active in the beginning stages of my research. She often accompanied me to different research-related functions including interviews. Like other researchers have commented that their own children or mothers have been instrumental in establishing rapport and trust with participants, I found this to be the case. After the passing of my mother, I feared the pain that would be coupled with collecting data.

*"Don't worry, don't be afraid. You know so many people because of your mom. Start with them and then continue from there. You're just like your mother, so good at talking with people. You'll finish and do good and important work."*  
(My Father, Juan García, 64 years old)

My father's encouraging words stayed with me as I re-entered the field. My mother's personal story, having once lived as an undocumented immigrant woman, also motivated my goal of undertaking such project. Indeed, this study is filled with similar life stories and experiences like my very own mother's.

I never shared the emotional pain induced by the process of collecting data with anyone, not even with my father or dissertation committee. Instead I wrote about it in fieldnotes and analytic memos. Perhaps one of the reasons I did not disclose this pain with my committee and father was because I did not want anyone to worry. The conversations I had with my father focused more on getting back into the groove of collecting data. I do not speak to my father about the emotional pain I feel for losing my



mother. The main reason is because I do not want him to worry about me so my way of coping is to write out the pain.

I did not share these feelings with my committee because I did not want them to question my academic/researcher identity. Since my mother was very helpful and encouraging of my Master thesis research, I was also constantly reminded of her loss each time I collected data for my dissertation research. Knowing that she was no longer physically with me to ask how my data collection progress and research were coming along hurt. I mustered the courage to move forward with my data collection.

I often found the data collection process emotional especially when women's stories were very similar to my mother's. Sometimes their experiences resonated and brought back memories of my mother's own personal story. It was painful listening to their stories dealing with agonizing memories of their past. Memories of stressful events that for some resulted in clinically diagnosed depression, suicide attempts, and drug use. Some of these include the loss and grief of close family members such as significant partners, siblings, parents, and even children. Others include the family separation created by deportations.

Yet as these experiences aroused melancholic feelings, they also provided hope. This hope was evident by how these women overcame such difficult obstacles. The ways in which they survive and continue living life with their heads held high left me with the hope that I too will surpass the pain and emptiness I felt after my mother's passing.

This research was also emotionally laborious because it deals with sensitive topics such as how Mexican-origin women survive in the United States despite facing

structural barriers. It also focused on symptoms of depression and what contributes to their depression. Many times the experiences shared by participants prompted me to get upset or frustrated with structural social problems and injustices lived by participants.

At times this prompted me to feel helpless and even guilty for my privilege. My privilege as a U.S.-born Mexican American educated woman made me aware that I indeed was “different” and “privileged.” This “U.S. citizen” privilege was also discussed by some of the U.S.-born Mexican Americans I interviewed.

Although my research explores the questions of how social context, specifically a hostile and anti-immigrant environment, impact women’s depressive symptoms and does not ask the questions of how one copes with losing a loved one, nevertheless I felt the pain. A sudden and unexpected death is yet another stressor that impacts one’s psychological health (Pearlin et al. 1981; Pearlin 1989). This also leaves me to wonder if, as I collected data for my Master thesis, women actually told me about instances of losing a loved one as yet another stressor associated with what contributes to their depressive symptoms. Perhaps I did not pick this up because I did not have this experiential knowledge to identify it. If this is accurate then one can argue the importance and value of having experiential knowledge.

It does not bias your research and instead it provides *experiential insights*. It makes researchers more sensitive to these issues, something that cannot be learned in textbooks. This is also similar to the identifying with others in your plight and connectedness one feels with others who have experienced the same troubles. I conclude this section with the following quote:

We must consider who we are and what we believe when we do fieldwork. Otherwise we might not see how we shape the story (Kleinman and Copp 1993, p. 13).

## **Conclusion**

My goal for this chapter was to detail the research design, data collection, and analysis of findings. Using a qualitative research design, I interviewed ninety Mexican-origin women in Houston, TX to better understand how a negative context of reception (e.g. nativism, racism, and unauthorized legal status) and illegality affects Mexican-origin women's mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression. This study also sheds light on how intersectional identities rooted in race, ethnicity, class, legal status, and nativity; affect Mexican-origin women's mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression.

By highlighting and validating my personal experiences throughout the research process, I feel it is a way of being transparent and reflexive with my data. More importantly, I feel that by doing this, it provides a space in which future researchers embrace emotions. I argue more research should validate emotions in the research process. By recognizing emotions, researchers can obtain findings through developing deeper analytical skills.

## CHAPTER IV

### LIVING A DEPORTATION THREAT: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT

#### WOMEN AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

*“[Living as a Mexican undocumented immigrant woman] is not feeling free. Its feeling oppressed. It’s not being able to achieve your dreams, not being able to grow as a person. It’s being limited on several levels, personally, psychologically, professionally, economically, at the family level, totally oppressed on all levels.”*

(Rita, 38 years old)

Undocumented immigrants face structural barriers in their social and economic incorporation into the United States society (Donato and Armenta 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Some of these barriers include: entering a racist society (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2000); a racialized and gendered labor market (Abrego and Gonzalez 2010; Browne and Misra 2003; Gleeson 2012; Massey and Sánchez 2010) that devalues unauthorized immigrants of color (Johnson 2004; Massey and Sánchez 2010; Ngai 2004; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). These barriers are exacerbated by their legal status (Abrego 2014; Donato and Armenta 2011; Massey 2007; Massey and Sánchez 2010; Viruell Fuentes 2007; Sullivan and Rhem 2005).

It is critical to point that unauthorized legal status is both a social and legal construction (Johnson 2004; Massey 2007; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Ngai 2004). Not having documents or papers does not only affect the social and economic incorporation of immigrants but it also impacts their families incorporation (Abrego 2014; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006; Yoshikawa 2011). As Rita’s opening quote describes, her life as an undocumented immigrant in the United States has been affected in a myriad of ways. In this chapter, I present the stories of undocumented Mexican

immigrant women and highlight how illegality impacts their mental health, particularly within an anti-immigrant climate and deportation era.

The current anti-immigrant climate of the United States plays a significant role in how immigrants are perceived and how immigrants feel about their position, or sense of belonging, (Massey and Sánchez 2010; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Particularly, today, Mexican unauthorized immigrants are not viewed favorably (Massey and Sánchez 2010). An increasing anti-immigrant climate is evident in the rise of hate crimes particularly against Latina/o groups, the increase in anti-immigrant group membership, and the restrictive immigration legislations that have been passed both historically and in present times (Galindo and Vigil 2004; Huber et al. 2008; Perea 1997; Sáenz et al. 2011). Coupled with this anti-immigrant climate are the record high numbers of mass deportations (De Genova and Peutz 2010).

### **Research Questions & Aims of the Chapter**

It is in this hostile context that I ask: how does illegality impact Mexican immigrant women's depressive symptoms, particularly within an anti-immigrant climate and deportation era? Unfortunately we know little about this question. Although undocumented status provokes intense challenges to the incorporation of the Mexican-origin population, few researchers have critically examined this question. Particular attention needs to be placed on a vulnerable group that continues to be marginalized and oppressed (Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012).

In this chapter, I use thirty face-to-face interviews to examine how illegality creates risks to exhibiting depressive symptoms among undocumented Mexican

immigrant women. Through their narratives, I document the life experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women living in an anti-immigrant society. Their narratives show the mental health threats associated with being an undocumented immigrant. These conditions affect their susceptibility to exhibiting depressive symptoms. Findings reveal unauthorized status to be a salient identity especially in today's anti-immigrant climate and mass deportation era.

Findings reveal that Mexican immigrant women's unauthorized status contributes to 1) a constant fear of deportation; 2) family fragmentation; and 3) economic uncertainty, conditions that create a susceptibility to depressive symptoms. This research underscores the role that unauthorized status, as one aspect of a negative societal reception context, plays in shaping the mental health outcomes of a vulnerable group, and challenges researchers to consider how illegality impacts immigrant incorporation and mental health.

### **Segmented Assimilation**

Segmented assimilation theory, the dominant approach to immigrant incorporation, argues that the ways in which immigrants are received into the host society, the context of reception, plays a major role in the incorporation process of immigrants and their children (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). The most relevant contexts of reception are defined by 1) governmental policies; 2) labor market conditions; and 3) attributes and features of ethnic communities (Portes and Rumbaut 2006 p. 92-93). Depending if immigrants enter a positive or negative context of reception in the host society, this can result in immigrant groups and their descendants

facing opportunities or structural barriers to their incorporation process (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006).

For instance, immigrants entering the U.S. as legal immigrants hence obtaining legal status and a favorable reception can positively impact their integration process (Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 1997). In contrast, undocumented Mexican immigrants entering the United States with a negative context of reception characterized by undocumented legal status, a racialized labor market, and by an anti-immigrant climate may result in an unfavorable integration process (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

Consequently, today's unauthorized Mexican immigrants are likely to face structural barriers based on their undocumented status and participation in a racialized labor market. These legal and economic barriers are exacerbated by anti-immigrant sentiment or racial discrimination (Massey and Sánchez 2010; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Overall, scholars adopting a segmented assimilation theoretical framework tend to focus on socioeconomic indicators. For example, researchers have investigated the trajectories of the Mexican-origin population by focusing on educational attainment (Abrego and Gonzalez 2010; Hirschman 2001), self-employment outcomes (Valdez 2006; Valenzuela Jr. 2003), and labor force participation (Passel and Cohn 2010; Portes and Bach 1985), to name a few. Although there are some studies that focus on immigrant incorporation in terms of non-economic indicators, such as intermarriage (Alba and Nee 2003; Qian and Lichter 2007; Telles and Ortiz 2008) and ethnic and racial identity formation (Jiménez 2010; Rumbaut 1994; Sanders 2002; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Waters

1994), fewer studies have considered how the incorporation process can be linked to a negative societal reception context spurred by an anti-immigrant climate and unauthorized legal status.

What is less well known, however, is the effect of a negative reception context on non-economic indicators, such as mental health outcomes (Castro et al. 2010; Cook et al. 2009; Horevitz and Organista 2012; Viruell-Fuentes and Schulz 2009). Even fewer studies examine how a negative societal reception affects immigrants' mental health and well-being; that is, how a negative anti-immigrant climate itself takes a toll on immigrants' incorporation experiences and mental health outcomes, such as depression. This chapter brings these two bodies of literature into conversation to highlight how stratification associated with unauthorized status extends to unexamined domains of mental health status.

### **Mental Health Risk Factors Associated with Illegality**

Several scholars suggest that understanding immigrants' health and mental health outcomes is critical to fully understand the process of incorporation among immigrants in the U.S. (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). For instance, Joseph (2011) focuses on the mental health implications associated with anti-immigrant discrimination and undocumented status. Using data from in-depth interviews with 49 return migrants – those who once migrated to the U.S. and later returned to Brazil – she finds that respondents experienced ethno-racial and anti-immigrant discrimination. Her findings suggest a need to make connections between unauthorized status, anti-immigrant sentiment, and mental health.



Previous studies have documented the experiences of people of color, perceived discrimination, and mental health outcomes (Williams and Williams-Morris 2000; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams et al. 2003) but few studies have investigated the relationship between unauthorized status, anti-immigrant sentiment, and mental health outcomes (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). Although numerous studies have identified a health advantage profile among Mexican immigrants relative to their U.S. born co-ethnics and white Americans (Escobar et al. 2000; Vega et al. 1998), little analytic attention has been paid to the disentangling of legal status and focusing in on how unauthorized status affects mental health. This paradox has been dubbed as the Latina/o Health Paradox.

### **The Latina/o Health Paradox**

Extensive research, including findings from Los Angeles Epidemiologic Catchment Area (LA- ECA) Study and the Mexican American Prevalence and Services Study (MAPSS), suggests that Mexican immigrants have lower rates and lower risks of psychiatric disorders, including depression, than U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Escobar 1998; Escobar et al. 2000; Finch et al. 2000; Markides and Coreil 1986; Vega et al. 1998). Various hypotheses have been posed to explain the apparent paradoxical association.

For example, the “healthy migrant” hypothesis argues that only the strongest and healthiest immigrants decide to migrate to the United States (Aranda and Miranda 1997; Jasso et al. 2004; Palloni and Morenoff 2001). On the other hand, the “salmon bias” hypothesis alludes to immigrants returning to Mexico when they are ill, therefore

contributing to an underreporting of unhealthy immigrants (Palloni and Arias 2004). Some of these hypotheses also reference protective factors of strong and family cultural ties, acculturation, and theories of relative deprivation (Shrout et al. 1992). Golding et al. (1990) have also documented differences in cultural expressions of distress. Other possible explanations include a lower set of expectations about what constitutes “success” in the United States (Escobar et al. 2000).

Yet, positive findings associated with immigrant status, or the Latina/o health paradox, do not account for differences across legal status. Little analytic attention has been paid to the disentangling of legal status and focusing in on how undocumented status affects mental health. Instead the Latina/o health paradox frames the relationship across nativity or among immigrants versus U.S.-born groups. Hence, the immigrant paradox does not differentiate between undocumented and documented immigrants. Consequently, the Latina/o health paradox tends to paint a rosy picture of the mental and physical health outcomes of immigrants.

The invisibility of undocumented status creates problems for researchers especially when attempting to create policies and health interventions for these groups. Contrasting the assumptions of the Latina/o Health Paradox that tend to paint a rosy picture of the mental and physical health outcomes of immigrants, adopting a social determinants of health framework would suggest another interpretation. A social determinant of health framework would suggest undocumented Mexican immigrant women may experience poorer health outcomes.

## **Social Determinants of Health**

Sir Michael Marmot's (2004) research elucidates the connections between the social environment and health outcomes, what has been coined as the social determinants of health. This framework argues for the importance of highlighting the social factors that create and perpetuate health disparities. Marmot writes about a social gradient in health which is highly influenced by socioeconomic differences and social position, a term he labels the "status syndrome" (Marmot 2004).

The social gradient of health suggests that those at the top of the hierarchy have better health profiles and live longer than those beneath them. Marmot (2004) argues that the lower an individual is in the social hierarchy, the less likely is their basic human needs for autonomy (or control over one's life) and integration, cohesion, or social capital in society. More specifically, he argues that having control and autonomy and a sense of integration are vital needs that impact one's health outcomes (physical and mental health outcomes). Through a social determinant of health framework, one can anticipate that undocumented Mexican immigrant women have poorer health outcomes given their lack of control and autonomy.

## **Immigrant Health: Bringing Undocumented Status to the Forefront**

I argue for scholars to investigate "unauthorized status" as an individual identity and social group affiliation assigned by the state, which is met by a negative societal reception in the U.S. Particularly today, the dominant mainstream segment of U.S. society holds a negative view of unauthorized Mexican-origin immigrants. This negative

view is likely to influence unauthorized Mexican immigrant women's mental health outcomes.

The negative societal reception that unauthorized immigrant women confront is coupled with structural barriers that they face, such as being of Mexican-origin, women, and from a low-socioeconomic background, which intersect and may increase depressive symptoms. I highlight and critically investigate how unauthorized status serves to further disenfranchise immigrants of color and how this in turn impacts depressive symptoms among Mexican immigrant women.

### **Depressive Symptoms**

I focus on depressive symptoms because depression is one of the most prevalent mental disorders (Martinez, Pincay, and Guarnaccia 2007). According to estimations by the World Health Organization (2012), depression is considered to affect 350 million people worldwide and is the leading cause of disability making it a major global public health concern (WHO 2012). Women are 50% more likely to experience depression over men worldwide (WHO 2012). By focusing on how unauthorized status can impact depressive symptoms among Mexican immigrant women this study expands the current scope of knowledge on immigrant integration and sheds light on a disadvantaged and vulnerable group.

Depressive symptoms include feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, sadness, lack of interest in formerly enjoyable activities, sleep and appetite disturbances, and at times, suicidal thoughts (Radloff 1977). This study centers on environmental stressors

related to undocumented status such as: fear of deportation, family separation, economic uncertainty, and how these factors contribute to depressive symptoms.

The findings of this chapter are split into five sections. First, I describe the journeys to *El Norte* for Renata and Rita. I do this to contextualize some of the conditions that motivated them to migrate. Second, I highlight the negative context of reception that unauthorized Mexican immigrant women experience. I do this by providing some narratives of what life is like as an undocumented immigrant woman in today's anti-immigrant climate. Third, I describe these women's perceptions of depression. Fourth, in highlighting the negative context of reception, I provide narratives that capture a deportation threat. In this section I describe the: constant fear of deportation, family fragmentation, and economic uncertainty, the major themes of this chapter. Fifth, I describe the discrimination and exclusion these women face. I conclude with a discussion on unauthorized status and its implications for mental health.

### **Coming to the United States: Renata's Journey to El Norte**

Renata, 49 years old, has been living in Houston, Texas for over a decade, first arriving in 2001. She lives with her husband and two sons. Her daughter also lives in Houston, Texas but has now married and has a family of her own. Renata and her husband met in Mexico and married when she was 16 years old. They are both from the state of Guanajuato and lived in rural communities. They worked in the fields growing different agricultural products. Renata's husband first migrated to the United States when he was a young man and each time spent 6 months in the U.S. and 4 months in

Mexico. Renata told me that was the life of many young men and in some towns still continues.

She was motivated to join her husband because she wanted to give the best life to her three children. Life was difficult for them in Mexico and they often did not have enough food to eat. Renata also talked about the ways in which women were treated badly in the town she lived. She did not want her daughter growing up in that environment and decided to take her three children with her to the United States to join her husband. Her daughter was about 16 years old and her two sons were 12 and 11 years old when they first came to the U.S. In describing the process, Renata recalled in tears:

*“... once I told my kids that we were moving with their dad it was such a joy for two of them except one of my son’s. He said, “No I have my cat, my dog, and my grandma.” (starts sobbing). My son didn’t [want to leave Mexico] and until this day it hurts me. He’s told me that in Mexico he had everything but what my son did not understand is that his father and I suffered to feed him.”*

Motivated to provide a better life for her children, Renata decided to join her husband in the United States. In the above quote, Renata expresses the pain she felt for bringing the one son who did not want to leave Mexico without his consent. But Renata saw migrating to the United States as a way of giving her children a better opportunity.

The journey to “*El Norte*” took three months. Renata recalled every detail from her three attempts to enter the United States. In the first attempt, her children and she were first going to cross the river and then use someone else’s documents to pass another check point once in the U.S. The *coyote* (human smuggler) and a border patrol agent (who assisted the *coyote*) worked together to bring people into the United States. They

crossed the river successfully but then her two sons were taken away by the *coyote*. They attempted to take her daughter too but she refused and latched on to Renata. In the end they were abandoned and were eventually caught by border patrol and returned to Mexico. Renata in her words explains:

*“we crossed with so much sacrifice and effort after being caught by immigration and thrown back but we tried again. It was my desperation to be with my family. Thank God that my sons were already with their father. I stayed with my daughter and I’m not sure if I should be telling you this (pauses and seemed a bit hesitant) one of the men they caught him already and he was raping young women, that was the same man that tried to take my daughter and my daughter latched on to me and since they didn’t want to take me with them, they left us both there, thank God. ”*

Renata explained that it was not until the third time they attempted to cross into the United States that they finally made it. She said: *“I tried three times. On the third try, we made it here. Thank God that the last coyote that crossed us over was good to us. He was fair. He didn’t let us suffer, not from food or water, and we didn’t walk much either. He was a good person.”*

Renata and her daughter finally made it to Houston in late December of 2001. Although several women described traumatic experiences in their crossing over experiences others felt lucky and blessed to have made it without suffering too much on the way. One common theme that is consistent with the literature is that the actual crossing over experience today has been a lot more dangerous given the militarization and surveillance of the border. One 55 year old woman who I call Maria Ines was caught and placed in a detention center for several months before being released and sent back to Mexico. The militarization and surveillance of the border has caused more families to

settle in the United States. This is coupled with the fear of the violence occurring in Mexico and the border.

Other women from this study described entering the United States with tourist visas and then overstaying them. The experiences also vary from those entering clandestinely. For example, some entered using someone else's documents (which is much harder today given the surveillance and militarization of the border) while some entered by crossing the river or desert and being hidden in vehicles. These experiences can be very traumatic and therefore can have an impact on their mental health. Indeed the entire immigration process – ranging from loss and separation from country of origin, family members, familiar traditions, exposure to new physical environment; and the need to adjust to a new place – may pose as risk factors associated with the development of several psychological problems (APA 2012).

Paying close attention to the contexts of exit, context of entrance into the United States, and context of reception are critical towards further understanding the complexities and health needs of immigrant groups. Theories of acculturation highlight the multidimensional process that immigrants undergo in adapting to a new host-country (Berry 1980). Some of the proxies used in measuring acculturation are: language use and competence; cultural identity, attitudes and values, food and music preferences, ethnic pride, ethnic social relations, and cultural norms. Mental health scholars focus on acculturative stress, which is related to the stress associated with the acculturation process that can lead to psychological difficulties (APA 2012).



By telling Renata's story of her motivations and conditions that led to her migration, I document the conditions associated with her life pre-migration. Age of migration is also another indicator that tells us how immigrants incorporate into U.S. society (Abrego 2011; Gonzalez 2011). Previous research has shown the differences between the 1.5 generation and the first-generation. For instance, growing up undocumented in the United States is different from aging as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. Next I provide Rita, a 1.25 generation undocumented Mexican immigrant woman whom grew up in the United States.

### **Coming to the United States: Rita's Journey to El Norte, 1.25 Generation**

Rita, 38 years old, was born in Mexico City and came to the United States at the age of 14 years old. Her childhood is filled with nice and fun memories of life in Mexico. She lived with her parents and younger brother. Rita described her lifestyle as middle-class in Mexico. While growing up she did not realize that her family was economically better off than most of her peers, but reflecting on her childhood, she now understands how lucky her family was.

Life was great until her father lost his job. He worked as a photographer in a newspaper that later became a political magazine. Her mother was a stay at home mother who raised Rita and her brother. After Rita's father lost his job, Rita's mom quickly began to search for employment. After struggling in Mexico for one year, Rita's parents decided to migrate to the United States. Her mother had been to the United States before, when she was 18 years old. She worked in Brownsville with a temporary agency to help

her ill mother. Rita's father had never migrated to the United States before. Once in the United States, he worked in construction. Rita explains:

*"She decided to risk everything... and just leave without us which was a big pain for my mother because she was a very overprotective mother... She dreamed about us, you know, being with her and of course she started working in a house taking care of kids. That was the ironic thing, you know, she was taking care of kids for someone else and she couldn't take care of her own kids so that was very depressing."*

Rita talked about the pain associated with the separation her mother felt. Rita's mother is not alone. Many other women who work as *domesticas* or nannies in the United States have to endure the pain associated with physically taking care of children in order to economically take care of their own children across borders (Abrego 2014).

For Rita and her brother who lived with an uncle and his family, it was also very difficult for them not to have their parents. Rita discussed how living with her uncle and cousins was constant fighting and being picked on. They could not wait to be with their parents. One year after her parents left to the United States, they returned for Rita and her brother. They made the journey together as a family. Rita recalls:

*"It was an adventure for me. You know we're going to get in the water. It was fun for me but for my mom on the other hand, now that's a different story. She was hysterical and totally nervous but for me it was an adventure. I was not scared. I don't know why for some reason I thought everything was going to be okay. The people that helped us were very good to us. They took good care of us."*

Since Rita was 14 years old when coming to the United States she recalls the actual experience of crossing over. However, for her the process was not frightening. Through the above quote, we can see the difference between Rita and her mother's outlook on the experience. I also provide Rita's story to juxtapose Renata's experience particularly to describe two sides to the migration experience. Because the eras in which these two

women migrated are different, I am also able to shed light on how difficult the migration process has gotten over the years. Rita came to the United States by approximately 1988 versus Renata and her family that entered in 2001.

Describing the context of exit and context of entrance are critical in further understanding what experiences migrants themselves bring with them once setting foot in the United States. Understanding these factors helps explain their incorporation experiences and susceptibilities to depressive symptoms. However, what is also extremely important in describing a fuller picture is the need to focus on the context of reception, or how immigrants are received in the U.S.

### **The American Context of Reception & Depressive Symptoms**

*“I feel sadness and fear at the same time, I’m always with that fear that something may happen like if the police stops me or that immigration will be there and I won’t be able to make it home or if I’m not with my kids... I’m scared... I’ll always be with that fear, sadness, and frustration... you become frustrated because you can’t do anything... like you can’t fix your papers to be here legally”*  
(Zenaida, 23 years old)

*“There is a lot of solitude, a lot of loneliness, and a lot of nostalgia being here when you don’t have papers, you live an absence, you miss out on many of your family’s important life moments, your family from Mexico... if some of your family members from Mexico die, you can’t go because you can’t come back. There are holidays in which you long to be with them but you have to make the sacrifice”*  
(Sonia, 28 years old)

*“Work opportunities are very limited and you have to keep pedaling and pedaling to find something... I think that’s why we get depressed and we lock ourselves in thinking we can’t, we can’t, and we can’t, and you fall...”*  
(Carla, 29 years old)

Segmented assimilation scholars highlight the impact the context of reception has on immigrants’ incorporation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006).

Yet legal status and its conflation with race warrants further study. Negative contexts of

reception, more specifically, one in which undocumented status creates conditions for these women to feel or express fear and oppression has an impact on their mental health. These women experienced barriers in their incorporation experiences based on their undocumented status and the anti-immigrant climate that permeates today's society.

The contexts of reception greatly matter in determining the integration process of immigrants. The U.S. contexts of reception shape the structure of opportunities or the structural barriers for immigrant groups. The contexts of reception refer to a group of factors affecting an immigrant group's mode of incorporation into the host society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). The most relevant contexts of reception are defined by "1) the policies of the receiving government; 2) the conditions of the host labor market; and 3) the characteristics of their own ethnic communities" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:92-93).

Past studies using segmented assimilation theory have focused on the "success stories" of authorized immigrants who were sought out by the United States government or who were welcomed and eligible for governmental assistance. These immigrants were greatly affected and due to the positive contexts of reception, they were able to integrate with the assistance of governmental policies. Such studies have focused on the success of Korean, Cuban, Chinese, and other groups who have been able to reach economic parity with Whites in the United States (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Zhou 1997).

Governments and their laws and policies play a major role in who comes and how they will integrate into the United States. Immigration laws have been used to

define who is considered a “real” citizen of the United States (De Genova 2002; Golash-Boza 2012; Johnson 2004; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Ngai 2004). Especially, for documented or authorized immigration, the government has control of who they seek and want in the United States. Undocumented immigration occurs when the government does not provide opportunities for all people to enter the United States. Historically, immigration policies and laws have been restrictive, exclusionary, and racist in nature (De Genova 2002; Johnson 1998; Ngai 2004).

Given these restrictive policies, not all people who desire to enter the United States “legally” have the option to do so, therefore, opting out or being pushed into entering the United States clandestinely. Government policies and laws are important and represent the outcomes of integration by determining the resources available such as economic opportunities, legal status, and governmental assistance (De Genova 2002; Johnson 2004; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Ngai 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). However, the undocumented population faces structural barriers which limit their opportunities in the United States.

### **Life as an Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Woman Today**

In centering on the governmental policies and laws, I focus on reporting the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women in this chapter. The undocumented population faces additional barriers related to their undocumented immigration status. Some of these barriers include a constant fear of their status being disclosed, a constant fear of deportation, and ineligibility for healthcare services

(Yoshikawa 2011); family fragmentation; and economic uncertainty. Ana, 30 years old, an undocumented immigrant from Nuevo León answered the following:

*“You can’t go out, you can’t enjoy, you can’t travel, for example, you can’t go to Miami [sic] to visit Disneyworld with your kids because you’re scared to be picked up and sent back to your country”*

Ana’s quote depicts the frustration of what undocumented immigrants deal with on a daily basis. Through her quote one senses the desperation and frustration she experiences in the United States, a place in which many immigrants believe is the land of opportunity but soon realize it is not the beautiful portrait that is painted in their minds.

This is particularly true for undocumented immigrants who do not receive governmental support and deal with anti-immigrant sentiment at every turn. This is exacerbated by the current deportation regime. Ana describes the barriers she faces and relates these barriers to being an undocumented immigrant. Her quote depicts an urgency expressed by many of the other women that were interviewed as they described what living as an undocumented immigrant entails.

### **What is Depression?**

Depression is a serious mental illness that should be treated. My findings suggest that women reported feeling depressed due to the limitations imposed on them, namely their lack of “legal papers.” Moreover, they found that a negative context of reception associated with their unauthorized status coupled with the current anti-immigrant climate, exacerbates their life experiences making them more susceptible to depressive symptoms. For example, Melissa, 38 years old, an undocumented immigrant from

Nuevo León answers the following after I asked her to define depression and to describe a time she has felt depressed living in the United States:

*“[Depression] is a harmful sickness. One thinks that it is not bad, but depression can even kill you. It takes a toll on you because it’s a mental condition. It depresses you to the point where you don’t eat. There’s a lot of depression among undocumented immigrants... I have felt depressed... You feel like crying all the time. You feel like everything is in vain. Why struggle so much, either way everything will stay there. Either way we will all die sooner or later without taking anything to our graves. When you are depressed ugly thoughts go through your head.”*

Melissa, her husband, and children entered the United States with a tourist visa. They overstayed their visas, becoming undocumented immigrants. In the above quote, Melissa discusses how depression is a dangerous illness that can lead to suicidal thoughts and death. Melissa described how she has felt depressed in the past putting emphasis on her undocumented status. Several of the women reported feeling depressed based on the barriers that they faced given their undocumented status.

Most of the undocumented Mexican immigrant women interviewed conceptualized depression as a mood mental health disorder. They mainly reported feeling depressed due to external factors. They attributed these factors to be present given their undocumented status. More specifically, they viewed depression as stemming from an external locus of control. For example, they viewed external factors such as undocumented status and a threat of deportation as impacting or limiting their opportunities in the United States.

Contrary to these findings, one woman, Linda from the state of Querétaro, spoke about depression as an internal locus of control, referring to depression as a negative manner of thinking about life. Linda viewed depression as “all in your head” and hence

not a “real” mental health illness. This conceptualization of depression was a common view that was expressed by participants as they talked about how some family members and friends view depression. They also described this to be the case of how depression was viewed in Mexico. However, many described their experiences in the United States leading them towards exhibiting depressive symptoms. They attribute it to the stressful life of living in the U.S. without legal status and not having the same social support they had in Mexico.

Although Linda viewed depression as “all in your head” an unfortunate situation with her son resulted in her to re-conceptualize her view on depression. I interviewed Linda in 2010. Two years later in 2012 I received a call from her. She asked if I could help her or refer her to anyone (i.e. an organization) that could help her son Luis. Linda explained that Luis had been stopped by the police for a minor traffic violation. He was verbally mistreated by the police officer and humiliated. This situation coupled with the frustrations associated with not being able to pursue a university education, led him to decide on returning to Mexico to pursue his educational dreams.

Linda called me to ask if her son could be eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that was issued by President Barak Obama on August 2012. I referred her to some pro-immigrant organizations but unfortunately Luis was not eligible. For Linda it was the stress associated with feeling impotent about her son’s situation that caused her emotional turmoil.



## **A Deportation Threat: We Live it Everyday**

Indeed, the women that I interviewed that had children who were also undocumented faced an additional stressor associated with a guilt and sense of responsibility for their children's undocumented status and barriers they faced. For example, when I asked Renata to describe what her biggest worries are in living in the United States, she explained:

*“My biggest worry right now is the possibility of one of my family member's to get deported. I worry they'll deport one of my sons, my daughter, son-in-law, or husband.”*

The threat of deportation was among the top worries and for those that had other family members that are also undocumented, the worries carried over. Many women described the pervasive deportation threat they live each day. Living in these conditions takes a toll on their mental health and makes them vulnerable to depressive symptoms. The current anti-deportation regime weighs these bodies down making them susceptible to experiencing depressive symptoms.

Previous literature on deportation has focused on the actual process of deportation (Coutin 2003; Golash-Boza 2012). Others have focused on the post-deportation outcomes outside the deportation nation (Peutz 2006; Golash-Boza 2012). While others have focused on the detrimental impacts deportations have caused for the family, children, and loved ones of the deported (Dreby 2012). Yet other scholars focus on “deportation as *a presence*: a constant possibility for people precariously living inside the United States” (Talavera, Núñez-Mchiri, and Heyman 2010 p. 167, emphasis

included in original). Along with living “deportation as a presence,” I focus on the possibility or threat of being deported.

I focus on what De Genova (2002) refers to as deportability, or the susceptibility of deportation rather than the act of deportation. My work is highly motivated by De Genova’s push towards examining the impacts of deportation on individuals and communities. Similarly, I define a deportation threat not by the mere act of being forced out or removed from the United States but instead by the threat or presumed threat of being targeted for deportation. A deportation threat therefore does not only impact the undocumented population but it also impacts the Mexican community at-large, or those that appear to be Mexicans. I highlight how a racist and nativist society further exacerbates a deportation threat.

Similar to a deportation threat, I focus on the risk factors and vulnerability of exhibiting depressive symptoms and not as the actual act of being clinically diagnosed with depression. I focus on symptoms of depression. The hyper-vigilance and threats that these women face, I argue, wears their bodies down creating a risk for depression. This is experienced by the undocumented Mexican immigrant women that reported: 1) Constant Fear; 2) Family Fragmentation; and 3) Economic Uncertainty (View Appendix H for a visual).

### **Constant Fear**

Respondents shared common sentiments regarding a fear of police and immigration officials, or of being separated from their families due to deportations. This constant fear contributed to expressions that included living in the shadows, imprisoned,

secluded, limited, and hidden. These expressions of fear ultimately contributed to symptoms of depression particularly because my respondents felt they did not have the security or safety net from being deported or separated from their families. For instance, Zenaida, 23 years old, an unauthorized immigrant from Guanajuato shares the following:

*“I feel sadness and fear at the same time. I’m always with that fear that something may happen like if the police stops me or that immigration will be there and I won’t be able to make it home or if I’m not with my kids... I’m scared... I’ll always be with that fear, sadness, and frustration... You become frustrated because you can’t do anything... like you can’t fix your papers to be here legally.”*

Zenaida captures the fear she constantly lives with due to her unauthorized status. Unauthorized immigrants deal with this constant struggle of navigating their realities having to constantly be “on the lookout” for police or immigration officials. The women interviewed reported feeling fear from police and immigration officials who have conducted raids, road blocks, and deportations in the Houston area.

For example, Zenaida, stated that living as an undocumented immigrant is living “with fear, fear that they’ll get you in a road block, for instance that they’ll be outside the apartment complex asking for your papers, for your social security, one feels like you are always hiding, like you always live with fear of going anywhere.” Zenaida actually lived it while driving to her apartment. She described the logistics and location of the road block:

*“... There were about 4 cop cars on the corner... I was coming through here and the police was right here (as she drew me the logistics of the situation) and then the cars came this way and the cops signaled them to go over where they were at. Another car and I were signaled to keep going... yes, I have been so close to those road blocks and yes I am extremely scared because I don’t have a license, I only have my consulate ID card... and I had my 3 children with me... I will never drive through that route anymore because there are too many cops.”*

This fear of being stopped by police officers was prevalent and expressed numerous times especially given the high numbers of raids and deportations taking place nationwide. This fear often prevents women from calling the police. This has major implications for situations that women endure (e.g. domestic violence and abuse) due to a fear of being deported. It also contributes to the underreporting of crimes. For example, Zenaida is a domestic violence survivor. She shared with me that she never reported her husband even though he had hit her numerous times before.

She thinks her neighbor called the police. She never sought help from the police due to the fear of being deported. Her husband had been deported to Mexico three weeks prior to the date we conducted the interview. Zenaida was struggling in deciding what would be the best outcome for her and her children given her undocumented status, being a single mother, and having only limited family support in the United States. Given these circumstances, she was contemplating returning to Mexico. This is only one example of plenty more that shows how restrictive policies and a deportation regime can heighten fear among the undocumented population and the local police. Going along with this sentiment, Daniela, 31 years old, from Nuevo León, states the following:

*“you feel secure [with papers] but since I don’t have papers you have to put up with things because the least thing you want is to be noticed... It’s like they say we live in the shadows. We live in the shadows so that no one, not police officers, not immigration, not the government, not anyone should know that we do not have papers”*

Again the theme of feeling isolated and constrained reappears as Daniela makes the comparison to living in the shadows. She also makes a connection of having to put up with certain things for the fear of her status being revealed. What it means to be an

undocumented immigrant today, in a negative, anti-immigrant context of reception, has major implications for all undocumented immigrants. These feelings of constant hiding and fear can have detrimental health consequences. Living with constant fear and internalizing social injustices without being able to speak up or challenge them is similar to the concept of racial battle fatigue which can have severe health impacts (Smith, Allen, and Danley 2007).

Smith and colleagues (2007) introduce the concept of “racial battle fatigue.” It addresses “the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 555). People of color continue to face discrimination and find ways to survive. Today’s immigrants of color also experience “racial battle fatigue” that is also coupled with legal status. They are battling both racism and anti-immigrant sentiment simultaneously.

Zenaida and Daniela’s quotes show the fear which unauthorized immigrants face daily. Living life in the shadows and in hiding from police officers, ICE agents surrounding their communities, or any suspicious individuals creates a hyper-vigilant state of mind that ultimately takes a toll on one’s mental health. The constant fear of being deported and what the consequences would mean if they were deported can wear down the body mentally and physically. This intense fear led to these women experiencing depressive symptoms.

As Daniela explains: “*you have to put up with things because the least thing you want is to be noticed.*” These feelings of “hiding” and “living in the shadows”

demonstrate the inability to have control and autonomy, factors that are vital needs in experiencing security, stability, and positive health. According to the social health gradient literature, undocumented immigrants that face this lack of control and autonomy will experience worse health outcomes. Given that many of the women are of mixed-status families (i.e., they have U.S.-born children as well as unauthorized children), deportation signifies the possibility of family fragmentation.

### **Family Fragmentation**

Some participants had personally been affected by deportations of family members. However, the fragmentation of families was also described at a broader level. For example, many women described that migrating to the U.S. signified the inability to visit their families, friends, and social support in Mexico. The fragmentation of the family causes unauthorized immigrant women to express agony at being alone in a foreign country, or so far away from home. Melissa expresses this sentiment in her discussion of why unauthorized immigrants experience depression:

*“For the simple fact of being far. For the simple fact of not being able to visit your family in Mexico. One goes through a lot of things here [in the U.S.]. You go through hard times here. Sometimes you just cry and cry. You get depressed without wanting to do anything. People go through these kinds of things. You can get sick and you can even die from depression.”*

For many of the women I interviewed, they described how not being able to travel to visit their families in Mexico contributed to their depression. Social support is critical for all humans, it decreases symptoms of depression and through social capital and support immigrants may have better ways of coping and incorporating into U.S. society. Melissa describes this further:

*“I have a lot of family in Mexico that I have not seen since I’ve been here... Just thinking what if they get sick and if you have to leave. It’s that constant thinking and you are always praying to God to take care of our families and to take care of us too, in order to calm us down a bit. That affects you a lot. The constant thinking... our parents are elderly... and thinking what if they get sick. What if you have to leave... and that depresses you.”*

Again the fragmentation of families is evident in the previous quote. Families can go for many years without physically seeing one another given their unauthorized status.

Melissa speaks about the ways in which she copes with the frustration of not being able to visit her elderly parents. She used her religion and prayers to calm her worries. This is a common reality among unauthorized immigrants that more often than not go years without seeing their family. This is a constant worry and strain for them taking a toll on their mental health.

As many women spoke about the fragmentation of families or the separation between them and their family and loves ones, they also described the inability of being able to travel to and from Mexico given their legal status. For example, when I asked Ana what life was like for her as an undocumented Mexican immigrant woman, she described the sadness she feels for not being able to visit her family in Mexico.

*“Sadness for not being able to travel to my country, of not being able to visit my family, not all of my family could come visit me and it gives you depression. Depression kicks in sometimes because you ask yourself is it really worth it?”*

Through this excerpt, Ana describes how she becomes depressed and questions if it is worth putting up with all the challenges of living in the U.S. Ana believes that the barriers and limitations she has faced in the U.S. have been due to her undocumented status. Being unauthorized for Ana means being confined and limited. This is a constant

worry and strain for unauthorized immigrants that directly affect their mental health and depressive symptoms.

Not only were travel limitations expressed with reference to crossing national borders but even travel within the U.S. For example, some participants described not feeling comfortable driving to visit family members that had moved to new immigrant destination areas. They described the inability to travel to Mexico and within the U.S., not only because of their undocumented status, but also because of the militarization of the border and mass deportations, which send an exclusionary message. Participants also described their current low economic positions as contributing to their symptoms of depression.

### **Economic Uncertainty**

Economic uncertainty has always existed for undocumented immigrants. However, today it is even more prevalent given the immigrant backlash accompanied by the economic downturn and harsh economic times. These tough times put additional strains on immigrants. The women I interviewed reported that being undocumented contributed to economic uncertainty in the forms of job opportunities and exploitation of their labor. They also described instances in which they were not paid for their labor, were underpaid, or were mistreated verbally while at work. Many women described the limitations imposed on them or their husband's job opportunity outcomes. For instance, Daniela states:



*“When I got here I got really depressed but I didn’t seek out any help and then it worsened. Until about 3 years ago or 4 years ago, it hit me again very hard to the degree that I didn’t even carry myself the same way. I didn’t even want to talk, eat, I couldn’t sleep. I had to go to the doctor and there I got medication for depression. I felt that I was going to have an attack. I couldn’t breathe from all the panic... it was depression. Well that’s what they told me because my husband was not working. Depression because I wanted to go back to Mexico and just thinking how everything here is based on money. If you don’t have money you are a nobody. The depression really kicked in”*

Daniela’s quote not only shows the economic uncertainty theme but it also illustrates the family fragmentation theme. She describes several depressive symptoms such as loss of appetite, loss of social activities, and insomnia. She also describes somatic symptoms such as not being able to breathe from the panic she was feeling. Daniela attributes these feelings to her husband’s unemployment and for wanting to return to Mexico, factors that are exacerbated because of her unauthorized status. Her quote also shows the importance of getting treated for depression at an early stage rather than later. This shows how depression if left untreated can get worse as time progresses. She makes another point in stating that the U.S. is a country based on economic power where those with money are rewarded and those without are considered “nobodies.”

This next quote by Ana offers an interesting extension to Daniela’s quote. Ana described how during the housing and economic crisis her family lost their house. She states the following:

*“Losing our house was very depressing. We were paying it for 3 years. A new house and then because we didn’t have any papers we couldn’t refinance it... ... and now we are here (referring to her present home, a trailer), it was very difficult for me (her eyes get teary) because being here in the United States means being away from your country and it’s a sacrifice”*

This quote demonstrates the economic uncertainty which many unauthorized immigrants struggle with on a daily basis. Ana acknowledges the opportunities the United States has compared to Mexico. She described how due to being unauthorized, she and her husband could not refinance the house; therefore, they had to lose it. This experience has been depressing for her entire family. Ana talked about how the “*ganas*” or desire, drive, and motivation to work hard, is not enough for the undocumented population because even this positive outlook of life does not save you from the harsh and unjust economic realities the undocumented endure.

Undocumented Mexican immigrant women also described the limitations of job opportunities available for undocumented immigrants especially during tough economic hard times and due to anti-immigrant legislations. Renata explained the following:

*“Being unemployed is hard. Since the president is getting stricter with E-verify program, many immigrants, we are feeling it.”*

In our interview, Renata described how being unemployed impacts the undocumented population. She and her husband have been out of work for quite some time. As we discussed discrimination she explained to me how her experiences with discrimination are intersectional. She described being undocumented, not speaking English, and her age as factors that worked against her in finding employment. In her words she describes:

*“Every time I go and apply for a job and if 3 working age teenage young women go and ask for the same job, they’ll give it to them. They’ll say, “we will call you” and they never call. Or if I call looking for a job and then they ask how old you are and I tell them my age, they’ll simply say we’ll call you back and again they don’t.”*

What Renata describes above is age discrimination. However, the undocumented population are further disenfranchised by other factors like their undocumented status,

age (if older), along with other social locations that are marginalized in the United States. Renata continues to look for a job but she knows that due to her age and undocumented status, her chances are extremely low in finding employment. Future research should also take into consideration the aging process of the undocumented population in the United States.

I also interviewed women that reported the exploitation they or their husbands experienced at work. They did not feel that they could stand up to these injustices due to their undocumented status. For example, Daniela states the following about her husband:

*“My husband would work and they would not pay him. Well, since he didn’t have papers or anything. One week they wouldn’t pay him or he would work an entire week for \$100... The United States is a trap. It’s a double-edged sword. It wasn’t the American Dream that we thought was there just by crossing the border”*

Daniela’s quote shows the exploitation and marginalization that many undocumented immigrants experience in the United States. These stories were told countless times.

Daniela makes another comment in the above quote. She describes the United States as a double-edged sword and not the American dream she bought into before migrating.

Other women also shared this sentiment. They soon realized that the U.S. is a double-edged sword and not the American dream that is so commonly perpetuated in public discourse. They realized and viewed the U.S as an illusion where dreams are shattered and become nightmares. Similarly, Massey and Sánchez (2010) find that immigrants initially buy into the American dream but once in the U.S., they realize it is a myth. They realized that although one may have the desire or “*ganas*” to achieve, they were faced with structural barriers due to their undocumented status.

Many women also reported how their undocumented status affects their job opportunity outcomes. Not only did they feel limited in their job options but they also stated how due to their undocumented status they were not able to move up within their jobs. While most of the women were housewives, many spoke about their husbands jobs and how due to their husband's undocumented status, these men were not able to move up even if they had the capacity. They also talked about the exploitation and mistreatment that some undocumented immigrants experience such as that of not being paid, being over-worked, and being humiliated, etc. The following quote by Ana states the following:

*“being undocumented puts a lot of barriers for my goals and it’s frustrating that not having papers does not permit you to go out and enjoy yourself, to educate yourself, to work, the simple fact of going to school, working, and going out to enjoy yourself are things that for me are extremely important and that are indicative of my mental health. I believe that directly negatively impacts my mental health”*

Ana speaks about the limitations or barriers she and her husband face due to being undocumented. She states that going out, work, and education are indicative of living a healthy life. She describes how being undocumented limits her opportunities to live a stress-free life and in the United States having documents is the foundation of getting ahead.

The undocumented Mexican immigrant women interviewed faced a deportation threat that led to living in constant fear, family fragmentation, and economic uncertainty. These cumulative experiences directly posed a susceptibility to their depressive symptoms. The relationship between deportation threats was directly impacting their depressive symptoms. The findings demonstrate the importance of viewing

undocumented status among the contexts of reception and how being an undocumented immigrant creates risks for exhibiting depressive symptoms. These findings show the social realities in which undocumented immigrants learn to survive in their everyday lives.

I have shown how and why these women are faced with structural barriers which limit their life outcomes. Regardless, of the desire, drive, or *ganas*, these women showed that they are faced with barriers such as undocumented status which has implications for their mental health. This huge impediment definitely plays a major role in their integration process and mental health. These findings also show how salient undocumented status is given that it even truncates positive coping strategies that Mexican immigrants have such as their drive and desire to get ahead. These coping strategies may be truncated by undocumented status and an anti-immigrant climate which condones exclusionary policies and laws.

Understanding how illegality plays a role in undocumented Mexican immigrant women's mental health outcomes from an intersectional approach is important. This is even more important for immigrants of color who are already facing discrimination and racialization but further exacerbated by their undocumented status. These women's lives are restricted, comparatively speaking to other people of color, as a result of their immigration status.

### **Discrimination and Exclusion**

In addition to deportation threats, I found undocumented Mexican immigrant women experience discrimination and exclusion making them feel unwelcome in this

country. Renata described the first painful memory that has marked her experience until this day. It occurred soon after she had arrived to the United States. One of her son's became very ill with a horrible stomachache. After trying several teas and home remedies, he was not getting better. Her desperation led her to seek help so she asked a young woman from her neighborhood to drive her to the clinic where she had gone to get her children's immunizations to enroll them in school. It was in that clinic that she felt unwelcomed. She explained:

*“There they made me feel well – what I am. That us that don't have papers, we are nothing here. I felt my son was dying. He was throwing up and the pain was unbearable... I went to the clinic and asked a woman who worked there for help... she told me that they could not see me because I was not one of their patients...I left the clinic with my son and I took him under a nearby tree and sat with him weeping in desperation (Sobbing)...”*

For Renata it was very painful to not be able to help her son through his sickness. She described that no one helped her or advised her on where she could seek help. Given that she was very new to the United States, she did not have many friends yet to help her. Through her quote we can see the difficulties associated with undocumented immigrants as they attempt to navigate the healthcare system in the United States. What also brought more tears to Renata's life was the coldness of the people. She described that the woman at the clinic was also Hispanic but did not give her any guidance on another location she can take her son.

For Renata and the other mother's I interviewed, they described their roles as mothers and their love for their children as worth the sacrifices they have made. They endure these sacrifices so that their children can have a better life. Yet they also feel conflicted and guilty for the pain associated their children's undocumented status. When

the children come of age and learn of their status and the barriers it creates, undocumented mother's often carry guilt. Many mothers described sacrificing it all for their children's well-being.

Maria Ines, 55 years old, was born in Mexico City. She met her husband in Mexico City and he was the first to migrate to the United States. Maria Ines misses Mexico a lot but remains in the U.S. because all of her five children live here and her husband prefers it over Mexico. Her youngest daughter came to the U.S. at the age of 9 and her oldest daughters were in their late teenage years when they first arrived.

Throughout the interview, Maria Ines described how she misses Mexico and finds it difficult to adopt the United States lifestyle. She believes these difficulties are related to her age. Maria Ines used to make circular trips to and from Mexico but has stopped going. She is much older now and the border is a lot more dangerous today. The last time she entered the U.S., Maria Ines was placed in a detention center in Texas. For Maria Ines, entering the United States without "legal" documents is not a crime. She said her desire to be with her family should not make it a crime. She described to me an incident that occurred after her release:

*"They took away my ring, consulate ID card, money and when I got out they said they didn't know what happened to my belongings. When I got on the bus the driver said, 'Who can loan this woman a jacket to cover these letters that she has on her back? ... I said 'Why? I didn't do anything wrong.'"*

Being detained and deported shows the ultimate form of exclusion created by state laws and borders. In addition Maria Ines described how she was treated as a criminal while in the detention center. She was upset that upon her release they did not return her belongings. A young man on the bus loaned her a jacket so she could hide the

orange suit she was wearing. Once she made it to her home in Mexico she said, “*I burned the ugly clothes and shoes.*” Maria Ines attributes her undocumented status, age, and lack of English skills as the reasons for her not feeling as she belongs in this country. Yet although she misses Mexico, she remains in the United States to be with her children (who now all have their own children) and her husband.

In describing how undocumented Mexican immigrant women experience discrimination and exclusion, age of migration is an important variable. For instance, the experiences of the 1.5 generation and their incorporation into U.S. society are distinct from the first-generation immigrants (Abrego 2011). Therefore this marks different ways that their illegality contributes to how they are otherized, discriminated, and excluded. For example, Rita, who came to the United States at the age of 14 (1.25 generation) explained how she had her first boyfriend at the age of 35 years old. In her words, she explains:

*“I feel that a man will never view me with value and desirability if I don’t have what I need to have so that I can feel valuable and desirable on my own. And whichever man that I could potentially be with will always throw it in my face or will see me as below them. I don’t think they will give me the value that one must have to be in a healthy relationship.”*

Rita described how difficult it is for her to “come out” even to her closest friends. Her main reason is that she does not want people to pity her. For Rita she avoids these conversations with friends. The one romantic relationship she had, she chose to end without telling him about her undocumented status. By not being able to date, along with the other forms of exclusion she has faced as an undocumented immigrant, it makes her feel different.



Although Renata, Maria Ines, and Rita all share the common experience of living as undocumented Mexican immigrant women, there are nuanced ways that this status plays out in their lives. The outcome, however, is the same. They attribute feeling otherized, discriminated, and excluded due to their undocumented status. These cumulative feelings of worthlessness, sadness, and despair can potentially have damaging effects on their mental health.

### **Discussion: Unauthorized Status and Its Implications for Mental Health**

Regardless of the positive outlook on life, the drive to achieve, the desire to want something better, the hard working attributes that these women resembled; they are faced with an ultimate major barrier, namely their undocumented status. This creates barriers and limitations on their autonomy, or control in their abilities to succeed. This major hardship and constraint, on top of facing other unfavorable contexts of reception, has not been critically studied.

Previous research has identified the impact racial discrimination has on negatively impacting people's mental health (Brondolo et al. 2009; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams and Sternthal 2010), the stressors associated with family separation among Mexican immigrants (Magaña and Hovey 2003), and the impact that material hardships have on mental health outcomes (Heflin, Sandberg, and Rafail 2009). Less attention has been placed on the impact of unauthorized status and anti-immigrant sentiment on the mental health of Latina/os (Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012).

Through this research, I bridge these research literatures on unauthorized status, illegality, an anti-immigrant climate, and how this relates to depressive symptoms

among Mexican immigrant women. Overall, this research speaks to the importance of accentuating legal status and illegality to further understand the context of reception and health disparities.

The findings suggest illegality serves to create additional barriers for the undocumented population. These barriers exist due to their undocumented status and are further exacerbated by an anti-immigrant context of reception. I find these women experience illegality through a deportation threat that contributes to: 1) a constant fear of deportation; 2) family fragmentation; and 3) economic uncertainty. I argue these three main aspects of the undocumented experience pose a threat on these women's mental health.

The findings reveal the intense and stressful lives that undocumented women endure, in keeping with recent observations that unauthorized status is associated with increased levels of fear (Abrego 2011; Golash-Boza 2012; Viruell-Fuentes and Schulz 2009). Findings reveal that experiencing fear is rooted in unauthorized status, and ends up taking a toll on women's mental health (Sullivan and Rehm 2005). Not only do unauthorized immigrant women live with a constant fear of deportation; they also face family fragmentation and economic uncertainty, which also increase depressive symptoms.

Family fragmentation affects undocumented women's mental health in two ways. One is directly related to this era of mass deportation, which results in the separations of families. Nearly one in ten families with children in the U.S. is considered a mixed-status family (Fix and Zimmermann 2001). Mixed-status families are composed of one

or both parents being unauthorized and one or more children being U.S.-born or siblings consisting of unauthorized and U.S.-born (Fix and Zimmermann 2001). These families include many combinations of U.S.-born citizens, permanent legal residents, unauthorized immigrants, naturalized citizens, and those that are in legal limbo (Dreby 2012; 2014). Mixed-status families are directly affected by deportations since many families have been separated in large numbers (Dreby 2012; Golash-Boza 2012). This separation has serious consequences in terms of the well-being and structure of the family.

The second influence of family fragmentation results from the undocumented population's inability to travel freely to and from Mexico as well as within the U.S. This is also a result of the militarization of the border which has contributed to a halt in circular migration. Some reside in the U.S. years, sometimes decades, without visiting family members in Mexico. These experiences worry many unauthorized women as some have left children in Mexico or have elderly sick parents. Others may have family members residing in the U.S. that have moved to new immigrant destinations and even though they live in the U.S. they will not visit these family members because of a fear of being stopped by police or immigration and being deported. Others may aspire to one day take their families on vacation but do not for the same reasons. Unauthorized immigrants also face economic uncertainties in addition to family fragmentation.

Research on unauthorized Mexican immigrants suggests that they face dire situations in the U.S. labor market (Massey and Sánchez 2010). They are part of the secondary labor market which is composed of labor-intensive and health hazardous jobs.

Unauthorized immigrants work long hours and are not given health benefits. Many unauthorized immigrants have experienced exploitation by employers, harassment, or at times no compensation for their services (Gleeson 2012; Massey and Sánchez 2010). This all exacerbates their already low economic status.

These three themes discussed above: 1) constant fear of deportation; 2) family fragmentation; and 3) economic uncertainty were common in describing how undocumented status serves as a barrier that impacts mental health. These findings show that unauthorized status and the conditions associated with this status pose a threat on these women's mental health. These links between being a member of a subordinate group and worse health, education, income, and wealth outcomes have been documented elsewhere (Brondolo, Gallo, Myers 2009; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams and Sternthal 2010; Marmot 2004). Recent research has moved beyond analysis focusing on income-based poverty measures to material (e.g. health care access, food shortage, ability to pay bills, and housing) hardships (Heflin et al. 2009). This push towards examining disadvantage beyond income measures has resulted in a more nuanced way of further understanding inequality. Both the social determinants of health and the material hardship literature move researchers towards further complicating the multidimensional determinants of inequalities. However, I argue that legal status adds yet another layer to the complexity in further understanding health disparities.

## **Conclusion**

The precarious status of unauthorized immigrants leads them to live their life with fear (Abrego 2011; Golash-Boza 2012; Sáenz, et al. 2011); family fragmentation (Abrego 2014); and economic uncertainty (Massey and Sánchez 2010). These findings have major implications for the mental health of immigrants and how this impacts their incorporation into U.S. society. These findings reveal the social significance of undocumented status and how the unequal social structure of the United States creates further challenges in the incorporation process of these women. These findings show the salience of undocumented status and how the barriers associated with being undocumented in the United States pose a risk towards symptoms of depression. Being an undocumented immigrant particularly in a time in which anti-immigrant sentiments are ubiquitous has major effects on their mental health.

Similar to Link and Phelan's (1995) call to focus on the social conditions of disease, more research needs to focus on undocumented status and the health risks associated with living as an undocumented immigrant in an anti-immigrant era. Link and Phelan's (1995) classic article argues that individual based risk factors that continue to dominate epidemiological studies must be contextualized by critically examining the root causes of health disparities. Furthermore, they argue social factors (e.g. socioeconomic status, social support) are "fundamental causes" of disease because they exemplify access to important resources.

Given the importance of unauthorized status and its implications on individuals' mental health outcomes, it is critical for future research to also focus on unauthorized

status in order to further disentangle the incorporation experiences of immigrants of color. It is critical to disaggregate the often conflated term of foreign-born versus U.S.-born to also investigate the differences within the foreign-born population (Zambrana and Carter-Pokras 2001). The findings of this study reveal the salience of unauthorized status as a category of identity that pose threats on the mental health of unauthorized immigrant women, and challenge scholars to consider seriously how legal status shapes the incorporation process.

**CHAPTER V**

**UNDOCUMENTED VICARIOUSNESS AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS**

**AMONG DOCUMENTED MEXICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN**

The undocumented population is not the only group to experience the broader consequences of illegality. Illegality may also extend to “documented” immigrants and even to the U.S.-born Mexican-origin population. Particularly in today’s anti-immigrant climate, the Mexican-origin population at large is bearing the brunt of illegality.

Racial profiling, for example, has had a direct impact in blurring the boundaries of who is perceived to be “undocumented.” Latina/os, regardless of legal status or not, are often questioned and viewed suspiciously as perhaps not belonging to this country (De Genova 2002; Menjivar and Kanstroom 2014; Ngai 2004). Mexican Americans are also viewed as “suspect of being undocumented.” This is fanned by a racialization process where even speaking Spanish can be viewed as a threat (Chavez 2013). This perceived and externally imposed “undocumented” status contributes to the ways in which Mexicans are treated, regardless of legal status, nativity, and citizenship.

What is the difference between authorized and unauthorized Mexican-origin women in the U.S.? The simplistic answer to this question is legal status. Obtaining or being “legal” has material consequences on an individual’s and family’s life chances. This category confers some rights and privileges. However, the issue is more complex than conversations of “documented” versus “undocumented” appear. Demarcating and

framing these identities as binary can be problematic and obscure the realities that demonstrate how legal status is socially and legally constructed.

### **“Illegality” and Boundary Making Between Immigrants**

The concept of “illegality” is often presented as a binary dichotomy, a black and white concept (Kubal 2013; Menjívar 2006; Yamamoto 2007). However the boundary between “legal” and “illegal” status is fluid and more complicated than it appears (Ackerman 2012). Migration is a complicated topic especially since the category of “immigrant illegality” changes depending on immigration laws and politics (Kubal 2013; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014).

My aim at separating undocumented Mexican immigrant women, documented Mexican immigrant women, and U.S.-born Mexican American women in this dissertation is not meant to reify the concept of “illegality” but instead I do this to demonstrate the complexity and similarities associated with how “illegality” plays out across these three groups. More specifically I highlight how their realities of “illegality” take a toll on their mental health. I focus on depressive symptoms associated with living in a racist and anti-immigrant society.

Research linking the relationship between racism and the detrimental impacts it has on the physical and mental health outcomes of people of color has been extensively studied (Brondolo et al. 2009; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams and Sternthal 2010). However, less is known about how legal status and an anti-immigrant climate further complicate the racism immigrants of color and their communities’ experience. Even less is known about how it impacts the physical and



mental health outcomes of immigrants of color and their families (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

### **Research Questions & Aims of the Chapter**

In this chapter I ask: how does illegality impact authorized Mexican immigrant women's depressive symptoms, particularly within an anti-immigrant climate and deportation era? Using thirty interviews with documented Mexican immigrant women, I find that these women continue to experience a threat of deportation making them susceptible to depressive symptoms. They experience what I call *undocumented vicariousness*.

*Undocumented vicariousness* plays out in the lives of documented Mexican immigrant women that are: 1) members of mixed-status families; and/or 2) have experiential knowledge having once lived as an undocumented immigrant themselves thus making them empathetic to the plight of the undocumented experience. Women that experience undocumented vicariousness continue to worry, stress, and describe the detrimental impacts deportations have on the separation of families. Women who themselves once lived as undocumented immigrants share a collective memory and story with the undocumented population. Their personal tribulations living as undocumented immigrants leave scarring and traumatic memories that cannot be easily forgotten. The constant and cumulative stress takes a toll on their bodies creating a susceptibility to depressive symptoms.

The findings of this chapter are split into five sections. First, I describe the common experiences and differences associated between documented and

undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Second, I shed light on the women that entered the U.S. legally. Third, I complicate illegality and show the fluidity of this concept by describing how statuses change. Fourth, I discuss how documented immigrant women are racialized today. Fifth, I describe how documented Mexican immigrant women experience a deportation threat and its implications on their mental health.

### **Common Experiences**

The field of migration health focuses on the physical, mental, and social well-being of migrants. Inequalities faced throughout the migration process have significant impacts on immigrants' health and well-being (APA 2012). The conditions associated with how immigrants enter the United States (context of entry; modes of entry) and the conditions associated with their migration move (context of exit; modes of exit) have an impact on the resources and vulnerabilities associated with immigrants physical and mental health outcomes (Torres and Wallace 2013). Additionally, the conditions on how immigrants are received in the host country (context of reception) also have an impact in immigrants' health (Torres and Wallace 2013).

Both documented and undocumented are immigrants and therefore experience a migration process. This includes moving to a new country, adapting to a new culture, leaving social support behind such as family, friends, and loved ones in their native lands, and often experiencing nostalgia. Both experience the physical and emotional costs of relocating (APA 2012). They share a common goal of bettering their lives and

their families' lives and are attracted to the United States with an ultimate goal of achieving the American Dream. Both face anti-immigrant sentiment targeting Mexicans.

Doña Dora, 58 years old and a documented immigrant originally from Michoacán, tells me about her experiences in the U.S. Doña Dora's U.S. naturalized citizen husband applied to bring Doña Dora and their two children to the United States. I asked Doña Dora to explain how life has been in the United States for her, she states:

*"It has been difficult for me because I don't have any family here. I have my children and that's it. If I've had family here then maybe it may be easier but I don't have anyone."*

Doña Dora's experience demonstrates how undocumented and documented women share in common this hardship of missing their family. Although she is a documented immigrant she continues to miss her family. The actual experience of moving to a new location, regardless of legal status, still induces the same feelings of missing family and disrupts their social networks. Another similarity is that of language.

### **Language**

There were few of the women that I interviewed that spoke English prior to coming to the United States. Those that did speak some English learned it in school. Some of the women that have lived decades in the U.S. are now fluent English speakers, especially the 1.5 generation. However there are others that continue to struggle with the English language. For example, Sandra, 33 years old, a documented immigrant from Michoacán, entered the U.S. clandestinely, fell in love and married a naturalized citizen, and legalized her status. She states the following:

*“When you go look for a job and you are an immigrant, you can be documented or undocumented. I’m a resident now. So an immigrant that is here with papers, legally, you can still be impacted when you go and ask for a job and they ask if you speak English... and they do not want to give you the job even though you can legally work. And for undocumented immigrants, it affects you more.”*

Sandra’s quote demonstrates how regardless of obtaining “papers” she is still excluded from jobs due to her inability to speak English. This demonstrates another aspect of how language affects both documented and the undocumented in their employment options. She described her frustration of how her life was like as an undocumented immigrant and not being able to work. Finally when she was able to work after obtaining U.S. residency, she is again limited because of the language barrier. She highlights both similarities between undocumented and documented immigrants but also recognizes that it is even more difficult for undocumented immigrants given they do not have the legal permission to work in the U.S. It is vital to mention that it is not only the fact that these women do not speak English but it is the ways in which they are viewed and treated by others for not speaking English that they feel excluded.

#### **Differences: “Finally I Can Visit My Family and Mexico”**

Although documented and undocumented women share similarities that are often unfavorable, the differences associated with documentation are usually favorable. The main difference between the documented and undocumented immigrant women is that the documented women have “papers.” They described having papers as given them security. The biggest advantage documented immigrants described is that they are able to travel to Mexico to visit family, friends, and loved ones. This is a big relief that all

immigrants, especially those that were once undocumented described. For example,

Sandra describes the following:

*“I lived as an undocumented immigrant for seven years. For seven years I felt desperate because I wanted to go to Mexico and I could not leave this country...It was so much desperation yearning for my family. My grandmother was elderly and so many years without seeing them... that is what hurts me the most.”*

As Sandra points out, having the freedom to travel freely was a common theme. Even among the undocumented immigrant women, they often described the family fragmentation they faced not only due to deportations but because of the inability to travel to visit their family members and loved ones in Mexico. Mental health research documents the importance of social support in combating depression (Vega, Kolody, and Valle 1987). The sociological immigration literature also documents the importance of social capital and networks in providing social support for immigrant groups and the impacts this has on the incorporation process (Hagan 1998; Portes 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997).

Both documented and undocumented immigrants yearn for their families. In the previous chapter, I demonstrate how family fragmentation affects undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Specifically, I show how missing family is associated with the actual act of migrating to a new country as well as the fear associated with deportations which separate families. A beneficial difference, then, among documented immigrant women is that they can legally travel to see their families in Mexico. Holidays, Mother’s day, family emergencies, and funerals are all times women described as essential to be with their families. Doña Dolores, 64 years old, an immigrant from San

Luis Potosí, first living as an undocumented immigrant and today is a naturalized U.S. citizen, explains:

*“Well it was very hard that I was not able to attend my father’s funeral. My father died and because I did not have papers I could not go because my life was on the line. If I would have gone, it would have been difficult to come back. And if I stayed, I would not pay my last respects. That was very hard for me. My father.”*

Some women described the pain of missing funerals. Yet others returned to Mexico and sacrificed their lives to come back into the U.S. after attending the funeral. Documented immigrants enjoy the freedom and ability to continue to build relationships with their family members and their loved ones. The unfortunate reality that Doña Dolores experienced, not being able to attend her father’s funeral, remains significant to her today. The death of a parent, a traumatic experience, is further exacerbated by the loss of control and ability to attend the services or spend time with their family members during such difficult times. Participants described feeling even more depressed given their inability to pay their last respects to their loved ones. As documented Mexican immigrants discussed their abilities to travel to Mexico they also mentioned the violence in Mexico as a deterrent to travel.

### **Context of Exit and Entry into the United States**

Participants were asked questions that capture their migration journeys. I follow Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s typology of family migration (1994). This typology describes three stages of migration: 1) family stage migration; 2) family unit migration; and 3) independent migration. Family stage migration refers to migration that occurs in phases or stages. It is used to describe families in which the husband migrates first and

the wife and children subsequently migrate. Family unit migration refers to families in which both parents and children migrate simultaneously. Independent migration describes women or men that migrate independently to the United States or who were single at the time of migration. Women who fall into this category initiate their migration themselves and in the U.S. they form their own families.

It is analytically and theoretically useful to understand immigrants' mode of entry because these experiences can have lasting impacts on their lives, especially if they entered clandestinely. It is also useful to use a typology of family migration because it shows how much knowledge the women had with the United States and the migration process. For example, I found nuanced differences among participants who had a long history of migration via their husbands, fathers, or extended family members who migrated first versus families that migrated together for their first time.

In my sample, there were a total of: 30 women that fit the family stage migration category; 16 women fit the family unit migration category; and 14 women that fit the independent category. Yet some of my participant's migration histories and journeys were a bit more complex. For instance, the women that first entered the U.S. as young children, also known as the 1.5 generation, were placed into one of the above categories depending on their parent's migration history.

Regarding the context of exit and the context of entrance into the United States reveals yet another difference between documented and undocumented immigrants. For instance, those immigrants that entered the United States through "legal" means did not have to endure the journey experienced by those that enter clandestinely. Yet not all

documented immigrants entered the U.S. via legal means. Some were able to legalize their status by marrying a U.S. citizen or U.S. naturalized citizen. Others have benefited from government policies that granted a form of amnesty in the late 1980s. There were few anomalies that represent the richness and complexity of migration histories.

One anomaly is the story of Doña Jesusita. Arriving to the U.S. at the young age of eight years, she was eager to be reunited with her father. Although her mother was born in Nebraska but raised in Mexico, they entered the U.S. clandestinely. Doña Jesusita recounts her family migration history and informs me that her mother was the daughter of migrant farmworkers. This explains her mother being born in the United States. Her father was born and raised in Mexico but migrated to the U.S. He worked in the fields of Modesto, California picking grapes but then moved further north to Chicago and worked in the steel mill factories back in the 1950s. Doña Jesusita recalls in tears the story of coming to the U.S.:

*“... we tried 3 times to get through. I don’t remember the first two times, I was too young. I remember the last time... there was this man that had gone to pick us up and we were going at 11 at night. I remember the night and it was dark. So we get to the border and the man shows the guard my mother’s papers. And the guard says “I’m sorry they’re not correct.” And my mother starts crying and she says “Señor, go through. Hit the barracks, just go.” And he said “No señora, nos matan, nos disparan y nos van a matar, no puedo lo siento mucho. (No Mrs., they’ll kill us, they’ll shoot us and they’ll kill us, I can’t, I’m sorry.”*

I highlight Doña Jesusita’s story because it demonstrates a traumatic and lasting impact. At the time of our interview she was 67 years old. Entering the U.S. at the age of 8 years old and now having lived 59 years of her life in the U.S., this experience continues to bring tears to her eyes.



### **Entering the U.S. with Papers: Who Comes Legally?**

Family stage migration involves the father or husband first migrating and then the family subsequently migrating (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). The context of exit and entrance may be different. For example, some families enter clandestinely. Some also come legally through the husband petitioning his family. Women who come here independently can do this clandestinely, or by entering with a tourist visa and overstaying it causing them to become undocumented.

Among the category of documented Mexican immigrant women, there are subcategories. One subcategory includes women that entered the U.S. via legal means. A second subcategory includes women that entered clandestinely. These women's motivations for migrating to the U.S. and their migration experiences are also different. Among the women of the second subcategory, some were able to legalize their status via immigration policies or through marriage to a U.S. resident, naturalized U.S. citizen, or U.S.-born citizen.

The women that were able to enter the U.S. through legal means were among the more economically privileged women from my sample. Some of these women described how their motivations for moving were not economical, despite the common perception associated with Mexican immigrants. These women moved because they married U.S. citizens or their husbands made the decision to settle in the United States.

Many of these women saw the United States as a place where they vacation, shop for clothes, visit, and then return to Mexico. Some of these women grew up shopping in the border cities like Laredo, McAllen, and Brownsville, Texas. Several of these women

lived in Mexican border states where it was traditionally common to have such movement and business across borders. Monica, 47 years old, born and raised in Monterey, Nuevo León describes the following:

*“I never wanted to go to the United States. For what? I had my career in Mexico and my family all lived in Mexico, what business did I have in the United States? But my mother said I had to live wherever my husband was and so I had to leave. It was so hard for me to leave my parents, my family, my job, and all my friends.”*

Previous research demonstrates the differences between forced migration, forced removal, and the impacts this has on people’s mental health (Torres and Wallace 2013). Therefore it is critical to fully understand the motivations and conditions related to the migration experience. Understanding the context of exit is also beneficial towards identifying the human and social capital associated with immigrant groups (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Monica demonstrates to us that she did not have plans or desires to move to the United States. It was not economic need. Monica’s main reason for migrating was because her husband lives in Texas. Monica has a Bachelor of Arts in Communication with a specialization in Publicity. She worked in a publicity agency for a while in Mexico but mainly worked with her father who owns several businesses in Mexico.

Monica’s husband was born in the U.S. but was raised in Mexico. He travels to Mexico frequently and in one of those trips he met Monica. They began dating and eventually married. After they were married, Monica moved to the U.S. Since she had her tourist visa she did not have a problem entering the U.S. Her husband started the

immigration procedures so that she could become a resident. She said the process ran smoothly and quickly. Monica is a naturalized U.S. citizen today.

Monica's experience and other women that had educational and economic opportunities resonated with me. It reminded me of my time in Puebla, Mexico during my study abroad experience as an undergraduate student in 2005. I lived with a host family composed of a mother, father, and 16 year old son. The family was well off economically. They all drove nice Audi cars including the 16 year old son. They also had a woman that would frequently clean the house and wash clothes. The family had visited Europe on vacations. This was unique to me especially growing up as a poor Mexican American woman in Houston, Texas and not being exposed to middle or upper class Mexicans.

I remember one day, while we were having dinner, the father expressed his frustration and disappointment with the United States. He said: "I would not go to the United States. They treat Mexicans horribly." I agreed with his assessment of the negative ways Mexicans, especially undocumented Mexican immigrants, are treated in the United States. That conversation remains with me today.

My experience living with an economically well-off Mexican family was interesting on several levels. First, it was interesting how they perceived me as a Mexican American woman who speaks Spanish. Indeed, they said, "*Wow you speak Spanish well.*" As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, my first language was Spanish. I was also placed in Spanish and bilingual classes until the fourth grade of my elementary years. Yet my Spanish has also been criticized by other "educated" Mexicans. Second, it

was interesting how they assumed I came from a family with money since I was attending a university and could afford to study abroad. I remember when they asked about my family and what my parents did for a living, they realized I was poor. I also shared with them that thankfully I was able to get a scholarship that covered my study-abroad experience. For me, I actually felt more connected with the woman that cleaned the house than the family that was hosting me. I am also well aware that poverty experienced in the United States is very different from the poverty experienced in Mexico.

I remember re-telling this story to my parents and a previous boyfriend of mine, who came to the United States clandestinely at the age of 15 to work. They all agreed that the father from the host family spoke from a privileged position because he did not “need” to migrate to the United States to support his family. I tell this story because I find it is parallel to Monica’s experience and to the other women that are economically well off to stay in Mexico or have enough resources to enter the United States legally. Although beyond the scope of this study, this narrative suggests that class and socio-economic status impacts who the United States allows in and who they exclude.

Previous research shows that even among the undocumented population living in the United States, they are not among Mexico’s population that has the least resources. In other words, they are not the poorest of the poor. Although most of the undocumented immigrants are from humble beginnings, they have the resources or networks living in the United States that assist them in making it here (Massey et al. 2002; Flores 2013).

It is critical to ask how migrants enter the United States to fully understand the resources they have or lack in the host country (APA 2012). It is critical to ask questions regarding the pre-migration and post-migration periods to get a clearer picture of the mental and physical needs of the population (Torres and Wallace 2013). Of course not all women experience such a smooth ride in coming to the United States. The women that had the “proper” documents to enter the U.S., even if it was a tourist visa, did not have to endure dangerous modes of entry. But even the documented immigrant women can become undocumented. For example, some women that entered with a tourist visa and overstayed it shifted statuses falling into an undocumented status. This shows the fluidity of illegality and how laws and policies dictate who fits under such categories.

### **Becoming Undocumented: Fluidity of Illegality**

“Illegality” is a status that is fluid (Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014). For instance, people can move from being “documented” to “undocumented” (Golash-Boza 2012; 2014; Kanstroom 2012) or from “undocumented” to “documented.” However, sometimes the process of transitioning from “undocumented” to “documented” is stringent, costly, and sometimes impossible. On the other hand, deportations or removal procedures are expedited for the undocumented and some documented immigrants (Golash-Boza 2012). Any noncitizen, or person who was not born in the United States, can be deported regardless of becoming a permanent legal resident. Any noncitizen can be deported if they violate any of the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The violations include: overstaying a visa; entering the U.S. without inspection; and/or ignoring a deportation order (Kanstroom 2000; 2012).

Rosalinda's story is a good example of demonstrating the fluidity of illegality. Rosalinda, 46 years old, born and raised in Monterey, Nuevo León and had her tourist visa since she was young. She reminisced of her childhood involving trips to Laredo, Texas (similar to Monica's childhood experiences). These trips involved shopping for clothes and going to the beach. It was in her early 20s that Rosalinda decided to remain in the United States.

Her previous trips to the border gave her knowledge and familiarity with the United States. Rosalinda has a total of seven siblings. Some still live in Mexico but Rosalinda made the decision to live in the United States. Her oldest brothers were the first to migrate to the U.S. Her eldest brother made the journey clandestinely traveling on top of freight trains. This brother settled in San Antonio, Texas and married a U.S.-born Mexican American woman. He is now a legal permanent resident. Rosalinda's mother's immigration procedures were approved to come to the United States as a legal resident, after Rosalinda had been in the U.S. for one year. Rosalinda's mother's sister (Rosalinda's aunt) had petitioned this request. It took over 10 years. But Rosalinda did not qualify to get residency after her mother became a naturalized citizen because she was over the 21 year old age limit. Rosalinda described that she once traveled to Mexico with her brothers (both legal permanent residents) and as they attempted to return to the United States, Rosalinda was questioned by border patrol. She explains:

*"They separated me from my brothers. They separated all of us. Then they begin yelling at me and threatening me. They said, "We know you work in the U.S., you live there don't you?" I denied it and then they said "Look your brothers told us the truth that you live and work in Houston. If you continue lying we will take away your brother's legal residency"*

Border Patrol took away Rosalinda's tourist visa and she was given a fine and not allowed to enter the United States. The border patrol agents lied to Rosalinda about her brothers. She told me, *"My brother's never said anything but I was afraid."*

After this incident Rosalinda describes her decision to migrate clandestinely by crossing the Rio Grande. She was motivated to return to the U.S. especially since her parents and most of her family had settled in the U.S. Rosalinda also had already begun to get used to the lifestyle of the U.S. She went from having a tourist visa to living as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S.

Taking a closer look at Rosalinda's experience, we see how the Border Patrol agents used deception, lies, and fear tactics on Rosalinda. Although she had a "legal" tourist visa, she was denied entry into the United States. They pushed her into a life of "illegality." Although traditionally when people think of the concept of "illegality" they normally attribute it to the undocumented population, however the reality is that this alleged condition of illegality, impacts the documented population and even U.S. citizens (Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014).

In sum, these narratives reveal that those that entered the United States through "legal" modes still encounter some of the same challenges that undocumented immigrant women face. These challenges are common to the migration experience involving: 1) moving to a new country; 2) adapting to a new culture (e.g. learning a new language); 3) loss of social support (e.g. family, friends, etc.); and 4) nostalgia for their native land. These challenges take a toll on immigrants' mental health but the most vulnerable are the undocumented population. Some undocumented immigrants have now been able to

legalize their statuses. They articulate how life has been for them pre and post “legal” or “documented” status.

### **Living with Papers, Transitioning Statuses: “*Sin Papeles, Ya No*”**

Juanita: *How did you feel once you received your documents?*

Doña Rita: *“Happy. I felt free, like free, like now I could go out.”*

Doña Gladys: *“I felt more protected, more umm, with more authority to defend myself against people that offend you.”*

Sandra: *“I felt secure, with a lot of happiness, with the desire of going to Mexico within the first 2 weeks after I got my papers. That was what I did the fastest. I went to Mexico. I was very happy that I had a social security, which meant having a driver’s license; I had identification, a way to identify myself. I could use the private health insurance through my husband’s job, when I could not even go see doctors, because I had to go to government clinics, and even those it was viewed negatively to go there.”*

Doña Rita, Doña Gladys’s, and Sandra’s comments demonstrate the benefits associated with documentation and legal status. Specifically, this transition ushered in feelings of security, a sense of relief, and freedom. These beneficial feelings were common themes associated with other women that were once undocumented but are now documented immigrants.

Other benefits associated with their legal status are the ability to travel to and from Mexico. Newly documented women made travel plans to return to Mexico quickly. Sandra describes finally getting a social security card. Coming out of the shadows, finally with a social security number, participants described the joy of obtaining a driver’s license, an identity in this country. Sandra also mentions the ability to obtain private health insurance through her husband’s job. The undocumented population faces additional barriers in obtaining quality healthcare due to a lack of insurance, low



economic status, and/or fear of their status being disclosed. Doña Gladys describes what it was like to live as an undocumented immigrant further:

*“Without papers one feels like you can’t defend yourself not even your rights. And from there depression kicks in. I have friends that I tell them “Don’t let them scream at you like that” and they tell me they don’t have papers. Instead they sit down and they cry.”*

I probed and asked: *“How does this impact you?”*

*She replied: “Well you also get depressed but then I also am their voice, I talk for them... A lot of people say “I don’t like problems, I don’t like fighting” but it’s not fighting, it is defending your rights.”*

Like Doña Gladys explains in her quote, other women that were once undocumented and are now documented articulated the safety net they felt once their statuses were legalized. They felt safer to carry out their normal daily lives in the United States especially in a deportation regime. These women associated having documents as being protected from deportation.

Doña Gladys also mentions how being undocumented makes one feel as if one cannot stand up for themselves. She described the injustices some of her undocumented friends undergo, such as staying quiet and not challenging anyone when they are being mistreated. Doña Gladys explained how she becomes depressed from seeing her friends suffer. However, since she is a naturalized U.S. citizen she challenges these injustices for her friends. Her citizenship allows her the control and freedom to do this.

The social determinants of health literature, provides a useful framework in explaining the implications legality has for women’s physical and mental health. The social determinants of health are the conditions in which we are born into, where we grow, live, work, and, age. These conditions are shaped by structural factors like the

distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels. Marmot (2004) writes about a social gradient in health, which is highly influenced by socioeconomic differences and social position, a term he labels the “status syndrome.”

The social gradient of health suggests those at the top of the hierarchy (in the U.S. this would refer to those with higher SES, whites, or members of any other dominant group) have better health profiles and live longer than those beneath them. Marmot (2004) argues the lower an individual is in the social hierarchy, the less likely their basic human needs for autonomy (or control over one’s life) and integration, cohesion, or social capital in society.

More specifically, he argues having control and autonomy and a sense of integration are vital needs impacting one’s health outcomes, both physical and mental. The social gradient of health shows that it is not the poorest of the poor that are sicker. In other words, the social gradient of health affects all not only the poor. Autonomy (how much independence and control we have of our lives) and the opportunities we have for full social engagement and participation are crucial for our health and well-being.

Although obtaining a legal documentation status provides many benefits for undocumented immigrants and their families, the reality is that obtaining legal residency does not protect immigrants from deportation (Golash-Boza 2012). This has been intensified by the harsh political context and laws that have been passed making life much more difficult for undocumented immigrants (Golash-Boza 2012; Kanstroom 2012).

For example, laws that were passed in the 1990s (e.g. the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) have: 1) made life difficult for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status; 2) expanded the law of who fits the criteria for deportation (including legal residents); and 3) reduced access to social benefits and services for the immigrant population (Golash-Boza 2012; Kanstroom 2007, 2012).

Additionally, obtaining legal status does equate racial equality and integration. Although, Doña Rita, Doña Gladys, Sandra, and other women that were able to legalize their statuses show that legal status does not mean you will not encounter racism and discrimination. These women continue to face discrimination. This demonstrates that these women remain excluded and therefore “legality” is not the great equalizer. Ideas and notions of illegality coupled with racism continue to plague the experiences of documented Mexican immigrant women. It is also critical to note that age of migration and legalization matters in how one experiences “illegality.”

### **Age of Migration, Generation Status, & Age of Legalization Matters**

Several scholars have identified the heterogeneity of how “illegality” impacts people and their families (Abrego 2014; Dreby 2014). For example, gender differences and legal status interact demonstrating how women and men experience illegality differently (Abrego 2014; Salcido and Menjivar 2012). Gonzalez (2011) using the life course perspective shows how children experience illegality differently across their life trajectories. Scholars have shown age of migration matters and impacts the incorporation

processes of immigrants differently (Abrego 2011; 2014; Abrego and Gonzalez 2010; Gonzalez 2011).

The immigration literature also differentiates across generation statuses which are determined by the age of when immigrants migrate. For example, immigrants that come to the United States as adults or who come in their late teens but come to work are considered the first-generation. Those that migrate as young children are considered the 1.5 generation (Rumbaut 2004). These two generations experience their “illegality” in different ways (Abrego 2011; Gonzalez 2011; Gleeson and Gonzalez 2012). The first generation enters the United States to work and have different aspirations and goals than the children. They experience their socialization into American life at work whereas the 1.5 generations are socialized in the education system (Gleeson and Gonzalez 2012).

#### **Luz: 1.75 Generation**

There are sub-categories even within the 1.5 generation. Immigrants that entered the United States between 0-5 years of age are considered the 1.75 generation; 6-12 years of age are considered the 1.5 generation; and 13-17 are considered the 1.25 generation (Rumbaut 2004). The main difference between these subcategories is that if immigrants that are the 1.25 generation come in search of work and not schooling, then their incorporation will be more like the first-generation (Gleeson and Gonzalez 2012; Rumbaut 2004).

What also matters is the age in which immigrants become legal. For example, Luz describes how life was like for her as a young child. She came to the U.S. at the age of 3 years old crossing over with her mother and younger brother. Her family is from the

state of Guanajuato in Mexico. Her father was living in the U.S. as a legal resident and worked in construction. Her youngest sister was left in Mexico with her grandparents until one week later and was then brought to the U.S.

Luz describes how she did not know what life was like as an undocumented immigrant particularly because she was a young child. She has no recollection of the migration journey experience but she remembers going to Juarez at the age of six years old. She states:

*“I didn’t feel the difference... I just remember this whole process whenever we went to Juarez and them [my parents] saying like “once we go, we’ll be able to go see grandma.” I didn’t really feel the difference. I didn’t think anything of it until later but at that point it wasn’t me. I was not undocumented anymore. It was through the people around me. It was everyone else around me that was undocumented.”*

The 1.5 generation spends their formative years in the United States. Those that have been able to legalize their status as young children, like Luz, often do not have many memories of how an undocumented status has impacted them. They experience illegality differently. This depends on the age of migration and age of transition from undocumented status to documented status. Luz experience exemplifies this but she makes a larger point that I argue in this chapter and dissertation. She acknowledges not fully understanding how illegality impacted her directly given her young age, yet she definitely experienced illegality through her family members, friends, and community that are undocumented. *“It was through the people around me. It was everyone else around me that was undocumented”* she said.

Similar to Luz’s experience of demarcating a trip to Juarez as “we’ll be able to go see grandma” my own family’s experience resonates with the sentiment of traveling

to Mexico. Although for me, I was born in the United States but my mother had once lived as an undocumented woman. It was not until I became older that I also pinpointed the Juarez trip as my mother's transition from undocumented to a documented status. In retrospect, my mother's visit to Juarez was the turning point and her transition from undocumented status to becoming documented. And similar to Luz's family, soon after my mother's trip to Juarez, my parents planned a return trip to Mexico for them and a first time trip for my siblings and me.

Luz's comment describes how undocumented status for her was not as salient in her life growing up especially because her family was able to legalize their status when she was a young child. However, Luz's experience and understanding of what "undocumented" meant was learned through her experiences with everyone else around her that was undocumented. It was through the lives of her extended family members, neighbors, and close friends, that Luz further understood what it means to be undocumented.

Until this day she continues to identify with the plight of the undocumented immigrant experience. Her narrative explains how undocumented status has broader implications for families and friends of the undocumented. It is clear that undocumented status does not only impact the undocumented individual but it has rippling impacts on how children are raised in the family (Dreby 2012; 2014; Yoshikawa 2011) and on our communities at a much wider level (Abrego 2014). For Luz obtaining citizenship was motivated by one sole factor. She describes:

*“Once I graduated high school he [dad] said: “Okay now you are ready to get married.” And my mom said: “No you are not. You have to finish college.” So initially whenever I applied to college and then applied for my citizenship, it was for one goal only. That’s if I ever married somebody that was here undocumented I would have the ability to change that. That was initially the only purpose because when we went off to boarding school, my parents got criticized a lot for letting us go far away.”*

In our interview, Luz mentioned she dated an undocumented immigrant long-term. They did not end up staying together but she stressed the importance of becoming a U.S. citizen so that in case she ever married an undocumented person, she would be able to submit the necessary paperwork for her partner. Earlier in the interview Luz told me that although she was undocumented as a young child, her family was able to legalize their statuses through her father’s immigration petitions. She made it very clear that she wanted to become a naturalized U.S. citizen because she understood the difficulties associated with the immigrant plight. She wanted to be ready for the opportunity to legalize her partner’s status in case she married an undocumented immigrant.

Although Luz did not marry an undocumented immigrant, she is actually still single but dating a white man, her efforts and motivations for becoming a naturalized immigrant demonstrate her connection and understanding of the plight undocumented immigrants endure. Throughout her interview, she also described how some of her family members continue to be undocumented. She said some of her friends are undocumented and lastly some of the students she teaches are undocumented. Illegality has broader implications that transcend legal status.

Luz is an example of how although becoming a naturalized citizen, she continues to understand the plight of the undocumented immigrants in the United States. Research on the 1.5 generation suggests that undocumented children attend schools where they are able to enjoy a sense of belonging and are taught the meritocratic values of the United States (Abrego 2011; Gonzalez, Heredia, and Negrón-Gonzalez 2014). They are taught to study and work hard in order to achieve their dreams. Yet it is in these same institutions that eventually they realize working and studying hard is not enough for them to achieve their dreams. For example, they are not able to participate fully in educational opportunities that require a social security number. Sometimes their undocumented status becomes salient once they turn 16 years old and want to get a job or a driver's license. Others realize it when they are not able to travel on school trips in the same ways their friends can.

Yet children growing up in mixed-status households can see the stratification associated with these different statuses, even within the same household/family. For instance, some notice it when they are not able to visit Mexico, like their siblings or documented parents visit, or how they are limited in healthcare access (Yoshikawa 2011). Children in mixed-status households live stratified lives divided according to legality within the family unit (Capps and Fortuny 2006; Dreby 2014; Yoshikawa 2011). Luz's experiences are similar to those of other 1.5 generation women in my sample. The 1.5 generation sample demonstrates how age of migration and age of legalization also play a role in how one incorporates into U.S. society but also how illegality impacts them. There are evident differences and some similarities between both the 1.5 and the



first-generation immigrants. There are also differences and similarities between the documented and undocumented Mexican immigrant women. However, an additional similarity between these groups that has grave impacts on their future can be examined by focusing on how they are racialized thus impacting their sense of identity, feelings of belonging, exclusion, and mental health.

### **The Racialization of Illegality: Identity Formation, Belonging, and Exclusion**

Previous studies have focused on trying to understand the racialization experiences of the new-immigrants post-1965. For instance, studies have focused on debunking the notion that Mexicans are “unassimilable” (Chavez 2013; Jiménez 2010; Johnson 2004; Ngai 2004; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Vasquez 2011). Political, academic, and popular discourse racializes the Mexican-origin population by describing them as a threat to national identity (Chavez 2013; Huntington 2004). Anti-immigrant supporters use the rhetoric of criminality and law to justify their racist beliefs (Johnson 2004; Ngai 2004). Although undocumented status is dealt as civil law, the media and anti-immigrant groups help fan perceptions of undocumented immigrants as “criminals” (Abrego 2014; Ackerman 2012; Golash-Boza 2012).

The race relations scholarly literature fails to consider how illegality and anti-immigrant sentiment have created new racialization experiences among racial and ethnic immigrants. LatCrit research has been at the forefront of these discussions highlighting how undocumented status is another indicator of inequality (Huber Lopez 2008; Johnson 1998; Romero 2008a). Huber Lopez and colleagues (2008) develop racist nativism as a conceptual framework that gets at the intersection between racism and nativism.

Racist nativism stemmed out of the need of critiquing dominant assimilation ideologies with a goal of highlighting how racism is imbued within the incorporation experience of immigrants of color. In an era marked by anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-immigrant policies, the legacy of white supremacy informs racialized perceptions of what is considered a “white American identity” whereby white Americans are perceived as “native” to the U.S. and all others as non-native (Feagin 1997; Huber et al. 2008). My aim with this research is to highlight the racialized experiences of Mexican-origin women across legal status and nativity. I argue an intersectionality approach allows me to address the complexities associated with how immigrants are racialized and how they experience illegality.

### **Microaggressions: The Cumulative Impacts of Illegality**

Racial microaggressions are subtle racist assaults that are rampant and flourish in a so-called post-racial and color blind society (Yosso et al. 2009). Microaggressions are: “subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic. In and of itself a microaggression may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence” (Pierce 1995, p. 281). It is the cumulative impact of microaggressions that wears down the body creating risks for physical and mental health illnesses. This leads to what Smith (2007) has coined as racial battle fatigue.

Smith and colleagues’ concept of racial battle fatigue (2007) is useful in explaining the racialization experiences that documented immigrant face. Similar to the

undocumented women, Mexican documented immigrant also experience microaggressions and racial battle fatigue. For example, Jazmin describes incidents in which she has lived microaggressions.

Jazmin, 28 years old, came to the United States with her mother and father at the age of two years old. She was born in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. She has a Bachelor degree in Sociology and a Master's degree in Social Work. She works as a Medical Social Worker in a hospital in Houston, Texas. I asked Jazmin about her experiences with discrimination. She described going shopping and not being greeted or offered any assistance. In her own words:

*“And even to this day and I am 28, I go shopping and it will be so long before someone says “Hi ma’am, how are you?” Or “can I help you today?” It happens almost every time. Then you will see a white person and they ask them immediately when they come to the door... but they don’t know I have a Masters. Half of the time they don’t even know that I speak English...”*

Although Jazmin is integrated into the American economy and society, she reveals experiences with microaggressions. Jazmin describes several times she has felt discriminated and excluded in different contexts. Many of the women spoke of this yet the difference between Jazmin and the others are that she spent her formative years in the United States. She speaks the language fluently yet she still feels excluded in many social contexts.

In the quote above, Jazmin feels as if her presence is invisible especially when a white person walks into a store and is greeted and welcomed. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) document the self-doubt Latina/os undergo after experiencing microaggressions. Sometimes the subtleties associated with microaggressions leave one in a complete

shock. The self-doubt leads to a constant replaying of the incident and questioning if the incident was real. This constant self-doubt puts additional stress on people of color as they have to navigate and find ways to respond to microaggressions.

Jazmin attempted to find an explanation. She makes a comment of looking “*like total shit*” suggesting that perhaps that may be the reason she is not greeted, welcomed, or asked if she needs any customer service while she shops. Jazmin perceives this discrimination to be racial because she sees the differential treatment whites receive as they shop or dine in the same spaces. This additional form of discrimination she faces is linked with perceptions of illegality particularly because she explains half of the time people do not realize she speaks English. This is indicative of her being perceived as a “foreigner” or “alien” (Johnson 2004; Ngai 2004).

Similar to racial battle fatigue, my findings demonstrate that Mexican-origin women experience microaggressions but do so in intersectional ways that are imbued in both racist and nativist assaults. These microaggressions vary a bit depending on generation and language that immigrants speak. I asked Jazmin how encountering this form of discrimination impacted her life. She explains:

*“you feel that you are never going to be good enough but yet I was raised here... I know more about my American culture than I know about my Mexican culture yet I am still not enough... the other day... I was in San Antonio with my mom and there is this place that I like to eat at and it is kinda like a fancier pizza place... I never felt discriminated there... And so I told my mom we really should go... And it was very interesting to see her because when they sat us down my mom sat at the table and she barely even spoke to me. She didn’t even flinch, she didn’t even move, and yet she had been talking about how hungry she was and how excited she was about to taste this pizza... She had the worse dining experience ever she didn’t even eat her food. She was so uncomfortable... She just wanted to get out of there... she was so out of her element and hating every*

*minute of it... you could tell she was sweating never looked up. She would look up and make eye contact with someone and would look straight back down."*

For Jazmin, having grown up in the United States she feels as she belongs, but continues to face exclusion. She chronicles the story that allows us to look more closely at how the 1.5 generation and first generation immigrants experience the same space but with different outcomes. Although, Jazmin did acknowledge that when she first started frequenting fine dining restaurants, she also felt out of her element. But her ability to speak English and her education background serve as a form of combating the negative experiences her mother felt. On the other hand, Jazmin's mother does not speak English and felt extremely out of place. This experience made her mother feel so uncomfortable that it was visible for Jazmin to notice her mother was sweating. Jazmin made sure to explain to me that this occurred just last year in November (since we interviewed summer 2013).

Throughout the interview, Jazmin, like many other women from this study shared with me stories of their family's personal experiences with microaggressions. It was evident that it was not only those experienced by Jazmin directly but that those shared experiences from her family have also left a mark on Jazmin's own life as well as on the other women that discussed their families' experiences.

Intergenerational family memory, the stories and experiences passed down from each generation (e.g. grandparents to parents, parents to children) has been shown to significantly influence the incorporation process and identity formation of each subsequent group (Vasquez 2011; Waters 1990). We learn from the memories and stories of each generation's struggles and triumphs. These stories often focus on their

migration histories along with experiences with racism, sexism, class mobility, and other successful stories, which all serve as socializing the next generations.

Jazmin's narrative demonstrates the broader impacts that microaggressions have on people. Similar to how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out, Jazmin senses a feeling of exclusion based on her mother's reactions to the same shared space. This form of exclusion extends over to the children of those that experience exclusion first-hand and also impacts their identity formation, feelings of belonging, and mental health outcomes. On another occasion, Jazmin described her most recent visit to her gynecologist where she experienced an intersectional microaggression. She explains:

*"[My gynecologist] is a white man and he starts telling me (mimicking the doctor's tone) 'so Ms. Gandara you're 28 and you are Hispanic' this is how he is saying it 'and you are about to be 29 in October.' And he specifically said: 'if you were planning on having 5 kids that's probably not gonna happen but if you wanted to have 2 kids that's probably a possibility...Again if you are thinking about having 5 kids, that's not gonna happen.'" (Raises her voice disgustingly) Why would he even say 5, why? What magically made him think the number 5? I've never been pregnant. I've never had a kid, why?"*

From this quote above you can see the grave impacts that microaggressions have on people. For Jazmin, the microaggression she experienced was more invading and uncomfortable than her lying naked while the gynecologist performed a pap smear and a well woman's exam. As Jazmin described this painful story to me, I could sense the tension and frustration she felt. It is evident that the doctor did not care about Jazmin's purpose of her doctor's visit. She had provided this information and made it clear she was also there to refill her birth control.

This silencing and invisibility of Jazmin's interests and the gynecologist expressing stereotypes on Jazmin, demonstrates a pervasive assumption about Latina

women. Through Jazmin's story we can see how the doctor used race, gender, age, sexuality, and immigration, as indicators of fertility and forced his preconceived views on Jazmin's reproductive rights. It has been well documented that Latinas are stereotyped as "hot", hypersexual, and have out-of-control fertility.

Chavez (2013) connects the "hot" Latina syndrome to other assumptions about nonnormative sexual behavior and out-of-control fertility to the Latino Threat Narrative. He writes: "The taken for granted assumption in the discourse on Latina fertility and reproduction is that Latinas are a population with "their pants down" and thus their reproductive behavior poses serious threats to the nation. Latina hyper-fertility threatens the nation's demographic future by adding to population growth and changing its ethnic-racial composition (read: proportionally fewer whites). The children Latinas produce are viewed as forming the basis for a potential takeover or reconquest of U.S. territory, Latinas and the children are perceived as destabilizing and bringing imminent destruction to the nation's medical and social services" (p. 109).

Similar to these ideas about hyper-fertility, I introduce Doña Cuca, 63 years old, a first-generation naturalized citizen also born in Guanajuato, who described a similar experience. Doña Cuca is the mother of nine children. Five children were born in Mexico and four were born in the United States. When Doña Cuca came to the United States she brought her five children with her to join her husband who had been working in Houston. She is a transnational entrepreneur that every other month travels to Mexico to sale semi-used clothes, house items, along with anything else she could sale. She also takes care of her grandchildren during the weekdays.

Doña Cuca came to the United States without documents in the late 1970s but she and her family were able to legalize their status through the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA.) When we discussed what life was like as an undocumented immigrant, Doña Cuca described that what hurt her the most was that her children were not allowed to receive a public school education. Doña Cuca is referring to a law in Texas that prevented undocumented students from attending public schools (K-12). This law was struck down by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) as unconstitutional (Olivas 2005). Thanks to *Plyer v. Doe*, Doña Cuca's children and many other undocumented children have received a public education (K-12) in the United States.

The discrimination Doña Cuca continues to feel, both before and after legalizing her status, stems from the ways in which she is treated for not speaking English. She describes different incidents occurring in medical clinics and hospitals. These incidents occurred with other Latina women microaggressing Doña Cuca. In her words:

*“When I was at the hospital after giving birth to one of my children, I had a nurse come up to me to say: “You need to get your tubes tied; you already have too many kids and it looks bad already” And I told her: “Look that is your opinion. I’ve never left you without electricity, gas, or water for you to pay my bills so what are you worried about? Take care of your family and let me take care of mine.”*

This particular experience that was also described by undocumented Mexican immigrant women and documented Mexican immigrant women, deals with the intra-ethnic conflict that they feel from U.S.-born Mexican Americans. The story Doña Cuca described in our interview is a microaggression that was expressed by another Latina woman. The intra-



ethnic relations between first-generation immigrants and later generation U.S.-born women deserve more scholarly attention.

My Master thesis also finds intra-ethnic conflict from the perceptions and experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Understanding these relations is critical but more importantly they should be understood within a racist, nativist, and white supremacy environment which these interactions take place. How and why do U.S.-born Mexican Americans take up these negative views towards recent immigrants? How does illegality impact intra-ethnic and intra-racial relationships? These questions are beyond the scope of my dissertation but will be further explored in future research.

From Doña Cuca's experience, it is evident that she was viewed as "problem" in the nurses' eyes. Her reproductive rights were challenged by the nurse who I would argue is operating out of a white racial frame (Feagin 2006). The nurse is also buying into the Latino Threat Narrative (2013) viewing Mexican immigrant women as hyper-fertile and as a public charge to the United States. These microaggressions serve to distance and mark differences between the nurse and Doña Cuca and send a broader message of exclusion and otherizing.

Indeed, Doña Cuca told me she does not feel that she belongs in the United States but is proud of all she and her family have accomplished. One of her own daughters is a nurse today and several of her children are college graduates. This brings her happiness yet she continues to yearn to return to Mexico. She has made plans to return to Mexico as time gets closer to her death. She wants to be buried with her parents in Guanajuato. These are conversations she has with her husband and children. Doña

Cuca spends a lot of time at hospitals and health clinics because she has diabetes, high blood pressure, thyroid problems, incontinence, and may also have arthritis. She explained that she takes several medications and is a cancer survivor.

Jazmin and Doña Cuca's experiences shed light on how illegality has become racialized and how this impacts the process of identity formation and feelings of belonging and exclusion in the United States for documented Mexican immigrant women. The next section of this chapter focuses on how illegality impacts documented Mexican immigrants' mental health, specifically focusing on depressive symptoms. By focusing on a racist and nativist United States characterized by a deportation regime, I am able to highlight the detrimental impacts this has on Mexican-origin women's mental health outcomes. The onus is not on the individual but on the social structure which perpetuates a negative image of Mexicans. This contributes to their feelings of exclusion in American society.

### **Deportation: The Greatest Representation of Exclusion**

In discussing how immigrants are excluded, the act of the United States deporting noncitizens is the greatest representation of exclusion (De Genova 2014; Golash-Boza 2012). Yet regardless of how immigrants enter the United States, that is if they come "legally" or come "clandestinely," they remain deportable if they are not naturalized U.S. citizens (Golash-Boza 2012; 2014). I bring attention to the context of entrance into the United States to demonstrate some of the differences associated with this group of documented women. However, if they are legal permanent residents (LPR) they or their families who are also LPRs can potentially be deported. Indeed deportation,

regardless of how many years they have lived in the United States, their contributions to the United States and having U.S.-born children can be deported to their native lands. Even some of the 1.5 generation that have lived most of their lives in the United States are being deported. Some only speak English and are being deported to a country they have never visited since they left. Regardless of their embedded roots in the U.S., they can potentially be excluded and deported at any time even for minor violations (Golash-Boza 2012).

The deportation rates today have made history. Indeed President Barak Obama, who was voted in by a large number of Latina/os on his second term especially (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera 2013) has been called: *Deporter-In-Chief* (Caplan-Bricker 2014; Lind 2014). According to some, Obama has deported far more people than any other president in the history of the United States (Caplan-Bricker 2014; Lind 2014). Over 2 million to date have been deported (Lind 2014). Others, particularly Republicans, are critical of these figures and claim Obama has not deported enough noncitizens (Stiles 2014). Living in a deportation regime (De Genova and Peutz 2010) sends a clear message: unauthorized immigrants are not wanted, especially Mexican unauthorized immigrants. Undeniably, the actual act of deportation or removal exemplifies the greatest representation of exclusion (De Genova 2014; Golash-Boza 2012).

These deportations and the threat of deportations impact many people including U.S.-born Mexican Americans especially because so many families are of mixed-status. Today's records indicate one third of families are considered mixed-status families and more than three-quarters of the children of immigrants are U.S. citizens (Capps and

Fortuny 2006; Fortuny et al. 2009). These numbers show the gravity of how deportation policies affect both U.S.-born citizens and immigrants. Given the prevalence of deportations taking place and anti-immigrant sentiment targeting Mexicans, the Mexican-origin community borne the pain associated with deportations. As we discussed the impacts of deportations, the women from this study described the fragmentation of families.

### **Deportations are Fragmenting Families and Creating a Mental Health Threat**

I asked participants: *“When someone mentions the topic of immigration, what automatically comes to your mind?”* Participants answered: *“Deportations,” “the separation of families,”* and *“injustice.”* For instance, Lucia, 52 years old, and a naturalized U.S. citizen from San Luis Potosí states:

*“I think of how children are separated from their parents, because the children are sometimes born here and they take their parents. I think this will be a huge trauma for the children as they get older. I think they will grow up living with fear, a trauma, they [government] should think of the impacts deportation has on children... I know that depression affects many people, both children and adults, because of the impacts deportation has on families.”*

Lucia’s quote gets at several themes. One is the separation of families as a result of deportations. Another is the impact deportations have on mixed-status families. Finally she discusses the trauma associated with deportations. Lucia comments that deportations are traumatic experiences for the adults or parents as well as the children. She further comments that because of deportations families become depressed because they are separated.

Lucia was once an undocumented immigrant. She first came to the United States as a young woman. Lucia and her sisters used to their mother pick cotton in the U.S.

Once Lucia turned 15 years old, she began working as a *domestica* in a Texas border town. Eventually she made it to California. She said she moved from California to Texas because “*immigration was really bad, they were deporting a lot of people.*” Similar to Lucia’s comment, Doña Rita states the following about deportations:

*“It’s bad because there are people that are not doing anything bad. These are people that are hard workers. They are not bothering anyone. The laws just keep getting stricter... the people that were born in the U.S., they can do as they please, but us what, and our brothers and sisters what, our own people what? I feel bad about the deportations... it makes me feel ashamed. I thank God that I was able to fix my papers. And people that work very hard and then suddenly immigration takes them and leaves their children.”*

Doña Rita describes how she feels impotent for not being able to do anything about the deportations taking place today. She is grateful to God for being able to legalize her status. The separation of families and the impact this has on children extends beyond those impacted directly by deportations. Her quote shows how deportations impact our community at a much wider level. Documented immigrant women continue to be impacted by these deportations, albeit in an indirect way. These women are grateful for having their statuses legalized but still feel the brunt associated with the undocumented population. They continue to have family members, close friends, or loved ones that are undocumented and it affects them to see how their community is treated.

Similarly, Doña Gladys states: “*One gets depressed just seeing on TV how Mexicans are treated. Like the raids with guns at jobs. They [ICE] treat them [Mexicans] like animals.*” Doña Gladys describes the inhumane ways the deportations and raids unfold. Participants described the deportations of innocent families as

wrongful, unjust, and inhumane. However, most of the participants mentioned deporting criminals as something that should occur. Yet they also realized that the majority of the time hard-working undocumented immigrants were the once being deported. By some of these women stating that they believe “criminals” should be deported, I gather they are also buying into the rhetoric used to justify deportations.

The figures for those who have been deported are clear. Many are deported for simply working without papers, driving without papers, or walking without papers, simply living in the United States without papers. The Human Rights Watch (2009) published a report entitled: “Forced Apart (By the Numbers): Non-Citizens Deported Mostly for Nonviolent Offenses” that debunks and disproves the popular belief that ICE deports “violent, criminal” undocumented immigrants. Their findings show that from those that were deported between 1997 and 2007: 72 percent were deported for non-violent offenses; 77 percent of legal permanent residents were deported, often permanently, for non-violent offenses.

Because some of the women in this chapter were once undocumented throughout their life trajectory, they have experienced a direct threat of deportation that could have resulted in their actual removal from this country. Additionally, because some of the women in this study have also been legal permanent residents, they too have been directly impacted by a deportation threat. But regardless of them becoming naturalized citizenship, they can continue to face a deportation threat in indirect ways. The fear of detention and deportation – some of the gravest repercussions associated with undocumented status – affect not only individual undocumented migrants, but also the

people around them. This creates a risk for depressive symptoms that also extend beyond the undocumented population.

### **From a Deportation Threat to Depressive Symptoms**

The documented women in my study share similarities associated with the factors that impact depressive symptoms among the undocumented Mexican immigrant women. Although indirect, their experiences are omnipresent and pervasive to a constant deportation threat. This deportation threat takes a toll on their mental health and makes them vulnerable to depressive symptoms. The current anti-deportation regime weighs these bodies down making them susceptible to experiencing depressive symptoms. It is important to note that documented immigrant women are impacted by a deportation threat but indirectly through what I call “*undocumented vicariousness*.”

I define *undocumented vicariousness* as the extended consequences undocumented status has on the lives of documented Mexican immigrant women. *Undocumented vicariousness* demonstrates how issues related to the undocumented experience have collateral consequences on the community that also impact documented women’s mental health. *Undocumented vicariousness* occurs in the lives of documented Mexican immigrant women that are: 1) members of mixed-status families; and/or 2) have experiential knowledge having once lived as an undocumented immigrant themselves thus making them empathetic to the plight of the undocumented experience (View Appendix J). I argue that these women continue to experience a threat of deportation indirectly making them susceptible to depressive symptoms. I use the

narratives of Gabriela and Sandra to show how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out for documented Mexican immigrant women.

### **Gabriela: Documented Immigrant Woman with Undocumented Children**

Gabriela's story helps us to understand how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out in her life and how it continues to impact her mental health. Gabriela, 55 years old, was born and raised in the state of Zacatecas. She has been living in Houston for over 26 years. She lives in a Mexican immigrant and Mexican American *barrio* on the east side of Houston. Gabriela first entered the U.S. clandestinely. She often made circular trips to and from Mexico. "*It wasn't like it is now*" she told me referring to the militarization and surveillance of the border. Some of her children were born in the United States and others were born in Zacatecas. Gabriela was able to legalize her status through IRCA. However some of her children remained undocumented.

Gabriela told me what happened to her youngest son who was born in Zacatecas but migrated with her to the U.S. as a young baby. "*He had never been back to Zacatecas since we first came until the day he was deported.*" Her son, Tomas, was deported at the age of 22. He was stopped by the cops and had one joint of marijuana in his pocket. Gabriela explained that the cops had no reason to search Tomas. However, they live in a neighborhood that is heavily policed. It is common for cops to randomly stop Latino men. I grew up in this same neighborhood and so I can methodologically triangulate from my personal experiences that cops often do this to young men and women of color especially if they are dressed a certain way, drive certain cars, or frequent certain blocks deemed as "hot" by the cops.



Gabriela continues telling me how blessed she is that she has her papers to visit her son. *“It’s not the same of course, I want him here.”* She said her son is doing okay in Zacatecas but misses him very much and worries about him especially because of the violence in Mexico. Her trips are costly but she is fortunate to have her papers to be able to visit him. She talked of other families that have been torn apart due to deportations.

*“Some have it worse. Imagine if I didn’t have papers. How would I see my son? Families are separated and torn apart all the time. And only for one joint of marijuana! He had never had any encounters with the police and his first time, he gets deported.”*

Gabriela’s story is not unique especially in today’s mass deportation era. Her son joins many of the 1.5 generation that have been deported to countries they do not know. Similar to the hyper-criminalization of men of color in the United States, undocumented men of color are also hyper-criminalized (Dowling and Inda 2013). Latino and Caribbean men are criminalized and are disproportionately deported (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). This is indicative of the intensive policing in Latino and Black communities of color as well as the disproportionate rates of convictions and harsher sentences.

In our interview, Gabriela described how her son’s deportation impacted her own mental health. She recalled the pain associated with her son’s deportation and at times she felt guilty. *“I feel impotent, there’s nothing I could do.”* She described how depression kicks in but that she must beat it since she has grandchildren that need her. The women that have or have had children that are undocumented have not all experienced an actual deportation in their families but a deportation threat lingers on in their everyday lives. This threat of deportation has serious implications on how they

carry themselves. It is through these constant states of hyper-vigilance that wears down the body increasing risks for depressive symptoms.

### **Sandra: Experiential Knowledge as an Undocumented Immigrant**

Sandra, 33 years old, a legal permanent resident from Michoacán, described how undocumented immigrants suffer from depression. She explains:

*“... when it’s time to look for a job and you go from one place to the next looking for someone to hire you and nobody hires them... I’ve seen, in this job, the faces of depression and desolation that the undocumented immigrants make when they come here and say “are you hiring even if it’s cleaning the building” and in every person that has come, I’ll put myself in their shoes, I’ve felt their pain because I remember how I used to go around asking for jobs when I didn’t have papers. I have friends that tell me about it too... And depression kicks in...”*

The quote above describes the economic uncertainties that are even more profound for the undocumented population in finding employment. Although Sandra is now documented she empathizes with the undocumented immigrant population because she was once undocumented and has the experiential knowledge having once lived in their shoes. She also has friends and family that continue to be undocumented. In addition to having this experiential knowledge, she describes how illegality impacts her family. She told me:

*“My mom does not have her immigration status fixed so she can’t return... So that is why my mother has to be separated from us. It’s sad, it’s very sad, because she is totally by herself not all my family members could go visit my mom.”*

Sandra’s mother had visited the U.S. previously but she no longer has a visa to return. Although Sandra does travel to Michoacán to visit her mom some of her family members that are undocumented cannot visit. This situation saddens her and continues to impact her life. Given that some of her siblings continue to be undocumented

immigrants, Sandra experiences undocumented vicariousness. For Sandra, like many other of the women from this study described immigration and deportations as the fragmenting of families. The inability to travel to visit family between borders creates feelings of depression and anguish.

In describing the discrimination and racism Sandra has felt in the United States, she recalls several experiences of microaggressions. Some include being called racial slurs as a result of her listening to Spanish music at work. She described another instance which deeply impacted her. She tells me:

*“My [U.S. born] cousin had a baby in Mexico and I told her “come on let’s go to the United States, we can ask at the border about what we could do.” Oh my God! They interrogated us for 3 hours...She gave them her documents where she had studied in Mexico, as an American citizen and they started discussing the situation. They kept saying: “tell me if you are trying to bring in this baby with false documents”...Why? Because she’s not white? I don’t understand if an American goes to Cancun and has a baby, you’ll let her pass...Yes, it’s racism, and yes they deported her and her baby regardless of being born in North Carolina.... There are times that I feel sorry because of the racism we experience because she had the same rights like a white person.”*

I probed further by asking her how racism impacts her life. She answered: *“It makes me feel impotent and makes me feel sorry that I can’t do anything about racist laws... it makes me feel impotent that I can’t do anything about it.”* These feelings of impotency and powerlessness take a toll on people’s lives. The cumulative impact of constantly dealing with microaggressions takes a toll on both physical and mental health. For Sandra, she saw immigration laws as racist and unjust. These experiences have impacted her throughout her life especially because she once lived as an undocumented immigrant. Today, she continues to have family members and friends who are undocumented. Women who themselves once lived as undocumented immigrants share a

collective memory with the undocumented population. Their personal tribulations living as undocumented immigrants leave scarring and traumatic memories that cannot be easily forgotten. The constant stress takes a toll on their bodies creating a susceptibility to depressive symptoms.

Gabriela and Sandra's narratives describe how even documented immigrant women can live undocumented vicariously through: 1) members of mixed-status families; and/or 2) having experiential knowledge given they once lived as an undocumented immigrant themselves thus making them empathetic to the plight of the undocumented experience. The second description demonstrates the lasting impacts "illegality" has on people's mental health. Documented Mexican immigrant women continue to face a deportation threat by association. They continue to worry, stress, and describe the detrimental impacts this has on their mental health causing them to exhibit depressive symptoms.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter describes the experiences of documented Mexican immigrant women. First it describes the similarities and differences between documented and undocumented women. By doing this, I also show the complexity of illegality and how regardless of legalizing papers/documents, these women continue to be racialized and face microaggressions. This chapter also documents the transitioning of statuses as some women were once undocumented immigrants and are now documented. Finally I bring to the forefront the racialization experiences that target Mexican immigrants. This contributes to their feelings of belonging and exclusion. Finally I demonstrate the

indirect impacts a deportation threat has on documented Mexican immigrant women's mental health outcomes, specifically depressive symptoms.

The main arguments of this chapter are two-fold. First I find that illegality impacts documented Mexican immigrant women and this varies among the first generation versus the 1.5 generation. More research needs to be done in this area. Documented Mexican immigrant women experience microaggressions and their documentation status is often challenged, questioned, or viewed suspect. Second I find that these women also experience a threat of deportation leading towards risks for depressive symptoms in an indirect way through what I call *undocumented vicariousness*. This pervasive threat of deportation indirectly impacts the mental health of the documented Mexican immigrant and Mexican American women.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**UNDOCUMENTED VICARIOUSNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG**  
**MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN**

*“I always say that I am first generation because I have this first generation mindset. The immigrant story.”*  
(Adela, 35 years old).

*“...I think I’ve adopted a lot of what it means to be American. I feel I’m Mexican like in my values. In things that I appreciate and I like in other people but I’m American like in more superficial cultural things...”*  
(Bernice, 28 years old).

*“[I’m] American. I was born here. I don’t know Spanish. I don’t really know anything about Mexican traditions or culture.”*  
(Mary Ann, 27 years old).

I argue that differences in identity and perceptions of immigrants are real and should be understood within an anti-immigrant negative context of reception. By focusing on identity and their racialization experiences, I find that the racism experienced by this group suggests a new form of discrimination that is highly imbued with illegality. Women that do not have any close ties with undocumented Mexican immigrants are in fact still racialized. The findings from this chapter show a new form of discrimination that is not simply due to being Mexican but highly interconnected with legal status. My research pushes for scholars to move beyond the black/white binary by honing in on legal status. Further this research unites race, immigration, and mental health literatures arguing for an intersectional approach that critically highlights legal status as another marker of stratification and privilege.

## Research Questions & Aims of the Chapter

This chapter focuses on the experiences of U.S.-born Mexican American women. Their generation statuses vary. For example, some are second-generation and others belong to families that have deep roots living in the United States extending over four plus generations. This chapter answers the following research questions: 1) How do Mexican American women define their identities, particularly in an anti-immigrant climate?; 2) What influences their identity as either ethnic, racial, or both?; 3) How do Mexican American women experience illegality?; and 4) How do these different identities map onto Mexican American women's mental health? The goals of this chapter are two-fold.

First, it sheds light on how illegality, nativism, and discrimination impact Mexican American women's racial and ethnic identities and their intra-group boundaries. I find some women strongly identify with the immigrant experience, often referring to their experiences as being "Mexican *Mexican*" or "real" Mexicans. Others are proud of their Mexican identity but also equally embrace an American identity. In contrast, some women identify as "American." Adela, Bernice, and Mary Ann's quotes demonstrate each of these categories.

It is critical to note that the ways in which participants described what it means to be a Mexican American woman in today's anti-immigrant climate varies. However, I remain critical that by further associating, dissociating, and moving the boundaries of what it means to be a "real" Mexican is problematic. These discussions are problematic because it serves as "made up" illusions of what it means to be Mexican. This framing is

a form of essentialism and makes simplistic or homogenous ideas about race and ethnicity. Yet, who has the power to demarcate who is a “real” Mexican leads to the problems associated with authenticity. By using these categories, my aim is to be critical of this process since the way people view themselves has an impact on their self-perceptions and self-esteem, having implications on their mental health. My aim is not to reify these notions of authenticity but instead to show the disadvantages associated with this process.

Second, similar to the documented Mexican immigrant women, this chapter shows that Mexican American women also experience deportation threats. I argue that Mexican American women are indirectly impacted by a deportation threat also creating a susceptibility to depressive symptoms. Similar to the documented Mexican immigrants, Mexican American women experience a deportation threat indirectly through what I call *undocumented vicariousness*. *Undocumented vicariousness* for Mexican American women plays out for those that: 1) are of mixed-status families; 2) married or have romantic relationships with undocumented immigrants; and 3) have loved ones that are undocumented and/or identify with the immigrant struggle. I argue these women also experience a deportation threat.

By experiencing *undocumented vicariousness*, it is evident how undocumented status goes beyond impacting solely those who are undocumented. More specifically, it shows that undocumented status has broader implications beyond the individual immigrant, typically identified as the sole unit of analysis. It also shows the gravity of “illegality” as it extends across legal status, nativity, and generation.



## **Mexican American Women Living in an Anti-Immigrant Climate**

The pervasiveness of how Mexicans are viewed in the United States today, namely as “illegal” and criminal (Golash-Boza 2012), I argue has detrimental effects on the mental health of the Mexican-origin community. For instance, the devaluation of what it means to be of Mexican-origin today has led to several stereotypes (e.g. in educational institutions) (Telles and Ortiz 2008). I suggest that the devaluation associated with being Mexican today and the synonymous and conflated identities of undocumented with Mexican negatively impacts the mental health of Mexican American women. A nativist and racist context of reception also has an impact in how Mexican American women understand their own racial and ethnic identities and the intra-group boundaries between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.

Jiménez (2010) argues that the constant influx of Mexican immigrants replenish Mexican Americans’ ethnicity. He finds that immigrants provide “ethnic raw materials” to later generations of Mexican Americans. These ethnic raw materials are not only facilitated by the influx of immigrants but also through a multicultural American society “which makes ethnicity a more acceptable and more desirable aspect of identity” (p. 251). A shared narrative binds immigrants and Mexican Americans. Acknowledging a racialized form of nativism, Jiménez finds nativism impacts U.S.-born Mexican Americans regardless of generation. Surname, accent, and skin color further exacerbate this discrimination and nativism (Telles and Murguía 1990). Finally, Jiménez argues the continuous influx of Mexican immigrants creates the Mexican-origin population somewhat of a “permanent immigrant group” (p. 253).

## **Being a Mexican American Woman in a Juan Crow Era**

It is critical to interrogate how Mexican American women understand their multiple identities especially within an anti-immigrant, nativist, and racist context of reception. In understanding how these women make sense of their racial and ethnic identities and how they continue to face a deportation threat, it is critical to highlight how legal status complicates their self-perceptions and how they perceive immigrants. Citizenship and legal status are markers of belonging in the United States (Telles and Ortiz 2008). Given that many Mexican immigrants lack a legal status this represents exclusion and disposability at its fullest (De Genova 2002; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Telles and Ortiz 2008).

The demographic realities of the United States reflect a large number of undocumented Mexican immigrants. Because of the way in which Mexican immigrants are perceived as “illegal,” this perpetuates negative stereotypes that impact the Mexican-origin community widely (Telles and Ortiz 2008). Beyond their direct and accepted identities, as women, citizens, Mexican American women are indirectly identified as undocumented Mexican American women who confront an externally imposed identity as “undocumented.” This has implications for the mental health of these women that undergo nativism and racism, regardless of their ties with the undocumented immigrant community.

Living in what some refer to as the new Juan Crow, which associates the state and local anti-immigrant laws with the Jim Crow era, highlights social inequality among Latina/os rooted in their perceived non-white, non-American status in the United States

(McKanders 2010). During the Jim Crow era, African Americans, regardless of the Reconstruction Amendments entitling African Americans to the full benefits of citizenship, were viewed as inferior to white Americans (Moreno 1995). Although African Americans functioned as members of society including contributing to the social, economic, and political institutions, they were simultaneously denied their privileges. This prevented them from fully participating in American society (McKanders 2010).

In a newspaper article published in *The Nation* by Roberto Lovato (2008) entitled: Juan Crow in Georgia, he describes Juan Crow as: “the matrix of laws, social customs, economic institutions, and symbolic systems enabling the physical and psychic isolation needed to control and exploit undocumented immigrants.” As legal scholar McKanders (2010) also argues the similarities associated with the Jim Crow era and the exclusion of African Americans in the South from fully participating in U.S. society, Latina/o immigrants today experience similar types of exclusion related to their perceived unauthorized status and foreignness.

Today “Mexican” is often equated with “undocumented” and “immigrant” (Golash-Boza 2012). This process of racialization, “the societal practice of assigning others to a “race”, which is generally ranked by characteristics such as intelligence and worth, or placing them in a racial hierarchy even if they are not referred to as a race” (Telles and Ortiz 2008:284) suggests that legal status matters for social in/equality.

This process of racial labeling also indicates the importance of highlighting legal status among health scholars – especially since the links between racism and perceived

discrimination and mental health outcomes have been brought to light (Brondolo et al. 2009; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams and Sternthal 2010). Yet the notion of how undocumented status or perceived undocumented status shapes mental health outcomes is understudied (Joseph 2011; Sullivan and Rehm 2005; Viruell-Fuentes 2007). It requires further, that researchers move beyond the traditional white/black binary when investigating immigration, race and ethnic relations, and health disparities. In doing so, using an intersectional approach provides a more comprehensive approach to the study of immigration, race and ethnic relations, and health disparities (Brown et al. 2013; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012).

An intersectionality theoretical framework provides a fruitful way to theorize about the experiences of Mexican American woman and their mental health outcomes. By bringing to the forefront how legal status further complicates these discussions, in addition to the traditional theoretical, methodological, and empirical explanations, towards understanding their experiences are necessary. In other words, it is critical to ask how illegality further complicates these women's identities and experiences in society. Another way that intersectionality theory helps this study is by identifying the complexities associated with demarcating clear distinctions between generation statuses.

### **The Complexities of Demarcating Generation Statuses**

Generation status, historically has served as a key marker of assimilation. Indeed the study of intergenerational mobility is examined through an assimilation lens. However, by simply focusing on generation status, immigration researchers miss how historical events shape assimilation patterns (Jiménez 2010; Rumbaut 2004; Telles and

Ortiz 2008). Telles and Ortiz (2008) argue for the need to disentangle generation-since-immigration and historical period. Rumbaut (2004) further documents the complexity associated with disentangling generations. Some scholars argue a better way of measuring generation and assimilation is to use both generation and birth cohorts to capture the historical events (Jiménez 2010; Jiménez and Fitzgerald 2007; Rumbaut 2004).

I experienced some frustration in differentiating a typology of generations. The women were placed under certain generation-since-immigration categories to assist me in the analysis. The second generation, the children of immigrants, has been growing rapidly given the influx of immigrants, fertility, and intermarriage. As a result, this complicates what “counts” as a specific generation (Rumbaut 2004). Our understanding of generation differences is methodologically, empirically, and theoretically important especially in understanding how groups incorporate into society. For example, there are differences between the 1.5 generation and the first-generation or those that have been in the United States for over four generations. There are also differences between second-generation immigrants that arrived much earlier and therefore experienced different historical events, indicative of how they perceive themselves and immigrants.

For example, Daisy, 31 years old, is a Mexican American woman from a mixed status family. Her experience as a U.S. citizen with immigrant parents reveals her connection and ties with the immigrant population. Daisy was born in Houston, Texas, making her second generation. In our interview, Daisy describes her appreciation to her parents for the sacrifices they made to give her and her younger sister a better life. Daisy

describes the guilt she feels and desire she faces to do well in the U.S. because of all the sacrifices her parents made.

Daisy's parents met in Mexico. Her father migrated to Mexico to work in landscaping first working in Arlington, TX. Throughout the course of his migration history, Daisy's father, Manuel, was deported four times. In one of the times that he was deported, he met Daisy's mother, Maria. Manuel returned to the U.S. and Maria followed. She was pregnant and made the journey to the U.S. with Daisy in her tummy. Daisy's younger sister was also born in the United States. Their parents were able to legalize their status through various forms. Manuel, her father, was able to legalize his status through IRCA. Daisy's mother on the other hand was able to legalize her status through her mother (Daisy's grandmother), who was born in the United States, but grew up in Mexico. Daisy explains:

*“My mom – my grandmother became a citizen because she was born up north in Texas and hmm... so they gave her “the border crossed you paperwork” (chuckles) because she was the only one that was born over here actually. Because my grandma – my grandparents used to cotton pick. And then they went back to Mexico. I was like, why did y’all leave? But it wouldn’t have been the same. I probably wouldn’t be talking to you in Spanish (chuckles).”*

Daisy's experience was not unique. In particular the quote mentioned above describes a common phenomenon among several women that participated in this study. The historical immigration stories of these women shed light on the complexities associated with demarcating generation status. This further complicates typologies of generational status (Rumbaut 2004). I define Daisy as a second generation given that both of her parents were born in Mexico.

Another example that demarcates the complexities of depicting a clear definition of generation status is the story of Grizelda, 55 years old. Grizelda was born and raised in Houston, Texas with both parents. She comes from a family of 9 siblings. Grizelda is second to the youngest of the 9 siblings. The three eldest siblings were born in Mexico and the rest were born in Houston, Texas.

During the interview, Grizelda explains that her mother was born in Mexico but her father was actually born in Houston, Texas. However her father and his family were deported to Mexico. Grizelda's father was very young when his family was deported and he does not have any recollection of this experience. He grew up in Mexico in the state of Michoacán. He lived his life never knowing he was a U.S. citizen until one of his older aunts told him he was born in Houston, Texas. Grizelda explained that her father had to enter the U.S. clandestinely. She states:

*"... my father in order to get his papers back then he needed to come in to the United States illegally until he got his papers from Our Lady of San Juan where he was baptized. Once he got his papers from baptism he was able to get his birth certificate... He was a United States citizen but he didn't speak English. He spoke Spanish. So they beat him very badly and you know after the beating here he got over and came back again, came to Houston..."*

Although Grizelda's father was born in Houston, Texas, he still crossed into the U.S. clandestinely. Once he was able to prove his citizenship, he was able to bring his wife and three children to Houston, Texas. His experience captures the inequalities experienced by U.S. citizens. This experience also sends a larger message questioning the meaning of birth citizenship in the United States. For example, what defines a U.S. citizen? Do U.S. citizens have to speak English and are they required to have lived their lives in the U.S. in order to be considered citizens? Furthermore is Grizelda a second-

generation Mexican American or is she 2.5 generation given her father's U.S. citizenship? Her example further elucidates the complexities associated with generation status.

To further show these complexities, I introduce Elena, 28 years old, born and raised in Houston, Texas. Her mother is a third generation Mexican American born in Weslaco, Texas. Her father was born in Mexico. Elena grew up with her mother, step father, and siblings. She did not know her biological father until she was over 18 years old. Growing up she did not speak Spanish in the home nor at school. Her racial and ethnic formation was based on her upbringing with her mother, stepfather, and siblings. Is Elena considered 2.5 generation?

The stories of Daisy, Grizelda, and Elena demonstrate the complexities of demarcating generation status. Both Daisy and Grizelda are considered second-generation, however they fit different birth cohorts and therefore the historical events they have lived are quite different. Daisy and Elena are closer in age and therefore share a historical generational experience. Yet their racial and ethnic identity formations are more complicated than they appear. In studying immigration it can be difficult to demarcate generational statuses clearly. Given the fluidity of migration statuses and the historical reality of circular migration, it was common to learn of family immigration histories like Daisy and Grizelda's. In addition, given the influx of Mexican immigrants, this also created a constant flow of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. and has impacted relations, including marriage, between recent immigrants and later generation Mexican Americans (Jiménez 2010). This sheds light on Elena's personal story.



Daisy, Grizelda, and Elena's experiences demonstrate the importance of understanding the communities and families that surround Mexican American women which help shape how they incorporate to U.S. society as well as their own ties with the immigrant population. Additionally, this helps shape the exposure people have with notions of what it means to be Mexican but born in the United States. Where they grow up, (e.g. in predominately Mexican immigrant neighborhoods versus a white neighborhood will also play a role in how people understand and navigate their racial and ethnic identities). Indeed their experiences are contextual and intersectional. In other words, participants described how identities are often contextual and are impacted by class, gender, education, religion, age, and the political climate, or the ways in which the broader U.S. society depicts Mexicans.

#### **“I’m Mexican *Mexican*”: Identifying with the Immigrant Experience**

Participants identified themselves as being Mexican *Mexican* or “real” Mexican. These women identified closely with the immigrant experience. What exactly does it mean to identify as Mexican *Mexican*? For some it was about speaking Spanish, engaging in Mexican popular culture (e.g. listening and dancing to *banda*, *norteño*, *ranchera* music, watching telenovelas), dating Mexicans, eating Mexican food, etc. They view speaking Spanish as empowering and actively help Mexican immigrants at stores, hospitals, or schools, especially if they need a translator.

When I asked Grizelda how she racially identified she said: *Mexicana Americana*. I further inquired what identity she identified more with, Mexican or American, or equally and why. She answered:

*“Mexican. I dream in Spanish. I pray in Spanish. I can go back and forth but it’s basically more Spanish. I find a sense of peace when I go back to Mexico even though I wasn’t born there. I feel my ancestors. I feel my abuela my bisabuela. I feel like I have a lot in common with her.”*

Similarly Daisy said the following:

*“I identify more with the immigrants, undocumented.”*

I probed further by asking: *“Why do you think that is?”* Daisy responds:

*“Because we are both struggling through school, through language, through trying to keep our culture alive at the same time though not allowing the Americanization to take over us, so we try more... Because my dad and my mom were a big impact too and my grandparents... so por eso tambien mas me identifico con alguien que es [because of that I also identify more with someone that is] undocumented”*

The association and shared experiences with the immigrant experience, and the undocumented immigrant experience more specifically were expressed by several women in this study. Most of the women that identified closely with this experience were either second generation, had undocumented family members, married an undocumented immigrant or dated an undocumented immigrant, or had close friendships with the undocumented population.

Both Grizelda and Daisy’s narratives demonstrate how their families’ immigrant experiences have helped shape how they identify themselves. They also both point towards language as being an important factor that has helped in identifying with the Mexican immigrant experience. Daisy points out the commonalities of young children (although born in the U.S. but raised by Mexican immigrants) and young children that came to the U.S. but are Mexican immigrants. Daisy attended public schools in Houston and in her early years of elementary education, she was in bilingual classes. She

described her classmates as either being born in the U.S. but to Mexican immigrant parents or children that were born in Mexico but brought to the U.S. as young children (the 1.5 generation).

The story of Adela, 35 years old, which opens the chapter, describes her association with the undocumented and immigrant experience. She identifies more closely with the immigrant population because of her childhood and family experiences. For instance she told me:

*“... There were a lot of immigrants and coming from Hawking University I was not used to being treated the way they treated them. No breaks, no restroom breaks, working past your hours, very little pay, bad health environment. You know the place they lived; it was nasty because they don't have any better place to live because they can't afford it.”*

Adela worked in the fields before she attended Hawking University, a predominately white university in a Texas city. It was her junior year in high school and her father told her: *“you are going to learn what it is to work.”* Her brother and father worked in Iowa in an egg plant during Adela's sophomore year at Hawking University. Adela decided to join them for the summer. In describing the working conditions of the egg plant where she was making \$3.25 an hour, she said:

*“I am in line with these eggs passing me by and you're getting dizzy. You haven't had lunch, you can't go to the restroom the mayordomo the floor supervisor is an asshole... Even though he is Mexican he will speak to you in English and he knows Spanish”*

Working alongside Mexican immigrants including undocumented Mexican immigrants, Adela learned the ways in which they were treated often by other Mexican Americans. She did not engage in that discrimination and instead identified herself more with the plight of the immigrant experience. She also saw first-hand the ways in which her

supervisor at the egg plant treated her different based on her ability to speak English. He treated those that were immigrants and did not speak English worse. Her quote speaks to the hazardous conditions associated with the work of migrants. She also acknowledged her ability to quit this job, lasting 3 weeks, given her ability to speak English and her legal status.

Adela's experiences demonstrate the vulnerability associated with the undocumented experience. By acknowledging her ability to quit the job it shows that by 1) speaking English; 2) being a US-born Mexican American; and 3) being a college student, she had the ability and freedom to quit while unfortunately that is not the case for her undocumented coworkers. Additionally, Adela's quote demonstrates the connection she felt with the undocumented population.

In describing the Americanization process, some participants described how on some levels they have adopted American values or ideals. It is often that the boundaries of what it means to be a "true" "real" or "Mexican *Mexican*" are contested. How do groups differentiate themselves? Is it a working-class association? How does gender further complicate this process? How does education and religion as social institutions further complicate this process? Some differentiate it based on how one looks, dresses, what music they listen to, who they choose as friends or who they choose to date. For instance, Antonia, 25 years old, states the following:

*"I still listen to the radio in Spanish, I watch novelas. My favorite food is tacos, enchiladas, [I identify with Mexican immigrants] cultural wise but also in my experiences. When I was in high school we did a lot of organizing and by then my parents were already citizens but it was still something that I saw as affecting my community ... at Ivy League University I was really involved with MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan)"*

Antonia grew up in South Central, Los Angeles. During our interview, Antonia proudly described her childhood experiences on what life was like growing up with two Mexican immigrant parents. Her parents each had previous marriages in Mexico and each had one child in Mexico. Both of her parents have first-hand experience with deportations, all before Antonia was born. Her parents met in Los Angeles and continue to live in the same one bedroom house in South Central Los Angeles. Antonia moved to Houston, Texas to work as a bilingual education first grade teacher.

She was the first in her family to attend college and graduated with a Bachelor degree in American Studies from Ivy League University and a Master's in Education from Private University. In our interview Antonia described her association with the immigrant experience given her parents stories and her family members. She said it was very common to have family members that migrated to the U.S. stop and rest at her family's house before heading to Seattle to work the fields.

In the quote above she describes her identification of what it means to be Mexican going beyond popular culture and food preferences. She was politically active protesting H.R. 4437 also known as the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. This bill passed by the House of Representatives in 2005 but did not pass the Senate. It spearheaded the 2006 immigrant rights protests across the United States. Antonia's engagement with the protests and her participation in MECHA serve as indicators towards her interest and identification with the immigrant's plight.

Daisy critiquing the Americanization process makes the following statement about her years at Public University and the friends she chose. Her friends participated in protests, listening and dancing to *banda*, *rancheras*, and *norteño* music. She states:

*"... those are the friends that I have that are my close knit family well I have a couple only because the rest are so Americanized they don't want to have kids... when you are too Americanized you can't have kids because son un estorbo [they are a bother]. "Oh I have a dog already."*

Daisy's quote further complicates the so-called Americanization process by bringing in gendered discussions of motherhood. She describes Americans views of children as a bother and attributes decisions not to have children or waiting to have children as being Americanized. Although Daisy makes these arguments she is cognizant the she herself also waited to have children. She states that perhaps it is a generational difference but remains committed to her argument stating Americans choose to have no more than 2 children.

I asked Adela to identify how she first became aware that she was of Mexican origin. She states:

*"I have always been cognizant about being a Mexicana and then living in Chicago the cultural parades like Cinco de Mayo or they always had a parade with Mexican Flags and sombreros and the Mexican dresses and ballet folklorico. So I always knew to be proud and then when I get to Laredo there is a difference between Mexicanos and Mexican Americans. Oh esos Mexicanos. They've got a license plate de Tamaulipas o Nuevo León. They live in Mexico, we don't live in Mexico."*

Adela's quote marks the time in her life where the boundaries between what it meant to be an immigrant and US-born Mexican were heightened. For her it was when she moved to Laredo, Texas, a border town. Her quote points to a regional difference and shows how the boundaries were blurred in Chicago. It was not until she moved to Laredo,

Texas that she was able to see and experience a distinction between a U.S.-born Mexican American and a Mexican-born Mexican immigrant. Adela describes that the high school she attended was only 22 blocks from the border and some students crossed it each day to attend high school in the U.S. She describes:

*“I know people would say “oh they are getting our resources. They are coming to get free lunch” but in other cases “oh that’s my cousin, that’s my primo (cousin), that’s my brother they live over there, we live over here” because back then everybody would just come back and forth whenever. The way they dressed the things that they were into like the music was different. Over here it was Tejano over there it was norteño or the cumbias.”*

Adela’s quote above shows the schizophrenic views of some U.S.-born Mexican Americans who do in fact view Mexican immigrants as free loaders, using tax dollars, and depleting U.S. resources. However Adela’s quote also shows the closeness and further blurring between these groups. On the one hand, they engage in anti-immigrant rhetoric while on the other hand they have family members that are Mexican immigrants. In our interview she mentioned that legal status became blurred too however, she said that by looking at the clothes people wore, their styles, and how they crossed the border (referring to walking versus driving nice expensive vehicles), one could deduce those who had legal status versus those that did not.

Adela’s experience is a typical one for those that grow up in border towns. In the interview she acknowledges the violence in Mexico that has created further problems associated with a smooth transnational education experience. The militarization of the border and the increased violence has created a halt or lessened these educational experiences.

### **I'm Equally Proud of Being a Mexican and American Woman**

The women in this section share several similarities with the women described above. For instance these women also describe their solidarity with the plight of the undocumented Mexican immigrant experience. These women also described their proud roots of what it means to be Mexican in America. Similarly the women described below are not ashamed of where their family comes from (even if they've lived in the United States for many generations) especially in today's anti-immigrant climate. They are also critical to the ways in which Mexican immigrants are depicted by the wider society. They also stand in unity for all Mexicans (U.S.-born and foreign-born) and work hard to dismantle widely held stereotypes placed on Mexicans. How are they different from the women described above?

A difference between the above group and the woman from this category is that these women embrace their American identities in addition to their Mexican identities. The women described above identified more with the immigrant experience. The women in this category state how they are proud of being Mexican but are also proud to be Americans. Most of the women in this category do not speak Spanish and tend to be later generation Mexican Americans. Women described their ideas of what Mexican meant for them. They described how on some ways they have assimilated to American culture (e.g. music, food, clothes, activities they participate in, etc.). The women that make this category range between those that are considered second generation and even some that do speak Spanish. However the majority of these women do not speak Spanish or speak very little of it. Some describe this as an impediment towards developing close



relationships with recent immigrants. However, they describe how they wish they spoke Spanish.

The story of Bernice, 28 years old, a scientist and Ph.D. student in Genetics (also has a Bachelor degree in Biochemistry from the Research One University) provides a unique story, particularly because of her close ties to the immigrant population. She was born in Brownsville, Texas but lived in Mexico until the age of 9. She lived in a border town in Matamoros with her mother, father, and brother. Bernice and her older brother attended school in the United States. They used a false address in order to make this happen. Her father worked in a grocery store in the United States and her mother worked as a nurse in Mexico.

Bernice described how her parents strategized in order to give her and her brother a U.S. education while maintaining family unity. Her father worked nights and he would take Bernice and her brother to an aunt's house in Brownsville. They spent the night there and would go to school. After school they would hurry over to cross the bridge into Matamoros. Her entire family ate dinner together so they saw each other each day. Her family also spent weekends together in Mexico. Other children they knew that also lived in Mexico but attended U.S. schools usually stayed on the U.S. side of the border for the entire week.

She states: *“As a kid it's not hard because it's just what you have to do but now that I think about it I feel really bad for my parents and everyone that has to go through that.”* In the interview she tells me that her mother always wanted to move to Brownsville to make life easier for her children. Her father did not want to leave

Mexico. I inquired why. Bernice described her father as being scared of change and her mother as proactive. She explains:

*“I guess she was afraid we were going to get caught going to school. Well because my brother was caught. One of his teachers in a public school figured it out and took him to the apartment complex we said we lived, and told my brother: “Identify the apartment you live in” and my brother was a small child. He was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I think. And he was like “I don’t know” and so my brother was kicked out of public school and so he went to private school.”*

I describe this about Bernice because she herself did grow up as a transnational student until she was 9 years old. Although she lived in Mexico and Spanish is her first language, she describes herself as identifying with Americans in some ways. The quote above demonstrates an incident that will always be imprinted in her family’s memory. The experience of her brother’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher policing and monitoring where he lives resonates with the current anti-immigrant climate in which many so called “patriotic” anti-immigrant groups like the Minute Men find protecting the border as a civic duty. Bernice’s mother was fearful that her children would be exposed to that humiliation and made it possible to have her entire family move to Brownsville, Texas. The quote that introduces this chapter captures Bernice identifying with the American experience on some levels. I probed to ask why she feels more American than Mexican and asked if she could provide examples. She said the following:

*“well because I think I’ve adopted a lot of what it means to be American. Like I’m obviously over weight and I’m lazy and I’m not as like you know in Mexico everyone is so warm and stuff and I’m not like that...but also I’m Mexican maybe in similar ways like my values are different than from, I mean, I don’t want to blame some of the ugly things that have happened to me on Americans, I don’t, I blame them on white culture. Like people who are white I mean obviously not all of them but the people that have wronged me I feel are very stereotypical white people...”*

From Bernice's quote you can see how she articulates her identity as a Mexican American woman. She has assumptions on what it means to be Mexican and what it means to be American. She associates being American with being overweight and lazy.

Throughout the interview she described herself as not fitting the traditional warm idea of what it means to be Mexican. She often described her identity through cultural explanations. Although she identifies as American she clearly states that her values are different than Americans and attributes them to being Mexican. The above quote also makes an important point. She describes being wronged by whites. She states that she blames the bad things that have happened to her on white culture and quickly makes the distinction by saying not all white people but the very stereotypical white people. Through this quote we can also see how the experiences we have throughout the life course impact the way we view ourselves. Bernice went on to explain how *"my culture definitely clashes with the culture of others."*

Bernice provides a unique story from the women that fit this category. The main reason is because she herself lived in Mexico, speaks Spanish fluently, is second generation, and continues to have family members in Mexico. Most of the women that fit this category do not speak Spanish and if they do it is very limited. For instance, I introduce the story of Gracie and Stella.

Gracie is a 52 year old woman. Stella is one of Gracie's sisters. Both are born and raised in Houston, Texas. Their families have lived many generations in Houston, Texas. From their father's side of the family, their great grandfather made boots for the Mexican army. He was a devout Catholic and faced religious persecution during the

*Cristero* war era. The army gave him 24 hours to flee the country or else he and his family would be killed.

His family fled to the United States. On their journey to the U.S. some of the children were lost. Those that made it first settled in San Antonio and later moved to Houston, Texas. Stella, 50 years old, and Gracie's grandparents raised their family in Houston, Texas and settled in a Mexican *barrio*. Our Lady of San Juan church catered to the Mexican community and Gracie tells me: "*Our Lady of San Juan was an old wooden church and her grandparents put the cornerstone in for the brick church.*" Her mother's side of the family has been living in the U.S. for several generations. She explains:

*"The Rojas family was one of the founding families of Little Mexico. First one to have a TV, to have a car... I remember protesting the Vietnam War. When we were in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, my parents took us out of HISD... so we went to the huelga schools. When I was in middle school my mother took me and my sisters to the first women's conference that was held here in Houston so they were very politically involved. My mom was in the junior LULAC when she was in high school. She got my dad involved. They sold the poll tax... we always volunteered... for tons of different stuff we always had to pay back."*

Both Gracie and Stella grew up with a family that was very politically active. Gracie described how instrumental her family was in getting the first Latinos elected to public office in Houston. They were involved with LULAC and several other organizations. Their grandfather also participated on the radio for the LULAC hour. They also moved to some of the suburbs of Houston, Texas. Their family was one of two or three Mexican families surrounded by whites. Soon enough the neighborhood experienced white flight as African American families began to move in. Today, their mother continues to live in that same house.

Their family was active with the LULAC movement in Houston, which advocated for Mexicans to adopt an American identity. However it was through the *huelga* schools and the young activists from the Chicana/o movement in which we saw a shift. This shift went from middle class entrepreneurs and politically involved groups arguing “We are American” to “We are Brown and Proud.” LULAC pushed for an Americanization process but when the U.S. attempted to integrate schools using Mexicans as whites, LULAC and similar organizations protested. This resulted in the *huelga* schools.

Stella explains, my mother said the way in which the U.S. attempted to integrate schools was not the solution stating: “*Our schools are no better than the African American schools so you’re really not integrating.*” She was referring to the conditions of the schools. Given that Mexicans were legally considered white yet experienced segregation too, the *huelga* schools were critical. Not only were they the impetus for whites and people of color to be integrated in schools but it changed the notion of “We are American” to “We are Mexican.” In the long run however, our schools remain segregated today. This is indicative of a racist system that although has moved beyond explicit racism in the laws, the practice of racism remains strong today.

It is critical to understand the political climate and the conditions in which one grows up because it provides an explanation to how race and ethnic formations are created (Jiménez 2010; Omi and Winant 1994). Given Gracie and Stella’s family involvement, this space created a sense of who they were as people and their obligations to their family and community. Today, Gracie lives in the house her father grew up in

located in the historical Mexican *barrio* I asked Gracie how her role as a Mexican American woman impacted her life? She answered:

*“If someone were to ask me what are you? Well I’m Latina, if they want to know what kind, then I’ll say I’m Mexican American, Chicana however you want to refer... I strive to communicate that pride and that value like going to see Sonia Sotomayor when she was here. I’ve been a delegate to the Democratic Convention, for 3 conventions now... I go to Latino this Latino that, not that I do that strictly because you know I live in a multicultural world you know it’s really more about issue at this point. Just yesterday we were at the Sister Simone and the Nuns on the Bus were here for Immigration Reform Now. We were picketing there in front of Ted Cruz’s office at the federal building. We were there, my mom and I, yeah we still do it. I’m like “Mother this is where we’re going.” And then after that my mother went to the redistricting hearing and she’s like 74. She was there for 3 and a half hours...”*

Gracie remains very active with her community and works for the city of Houston. As the above quote describes her mother also still remains very active. Gracie attended Research University in the early 1980s and has several degrees including a Bachelor in Government, a JD degree, and another degree from the School of Public Affairs. Her parents do not hold college degrees but a 76 year old uncle attended Hawking University.

Gracie is financially secure and has one biracial son that is 23 years old. She raised him as a single mother and teaches him to embrace both his African American and Mexican identities. I visited her house for the interview, a beautiful historic home in the historic Mexican *barrio* of Houston. The house was full of portraits of family members. During our interview, she showed me different pictures of her family. Gracie was very proud that she is living in the same house her father grew up in. Her father passed away three years ago. The above quote demonstrates her and her family’s continuous commitment for issues that impact the Mexican American community at large.

Gracie told me about her sister Stella suggesting I should meet her and interview her. She especially wanted me to meet Stella because Stella graduated with a Ph.D. in Sociology from the Research One University and now works for a university. I contacted Stella and she agreed to participate in the study. When I asked her what it means to be a Mexican American woman today and how this has impacted her life, Stella replied:

*“...Pride in your country and for us as Mexican Americans we are [also] proud to be Americans... I know I’m proud of being a Mexican American woman and I will call people on things especially if its gender related. I mean I think that it impacts everything I do but I don’t necessarily tell people “oh you need to treat me this way because I’m a Mexican American woman.” It impacts everything I do and I’m aware of that as a person of color and as a woman I’m totally conscious of the world and how we may or may not be treated differently but I don’t live my life thinking oh they’re treating me this way because I’m Mexican or because I’m a woman.”*

Stella describes the pride she feels for being both Mexican and American. Moreover, she emphasizes her pride in being a woman too. As a woman who studied Mathematics at Hawking University in the early 1980s, she described how salient her gender identity had been especially in a male dominated field. Stella is conscious of how her multiple identities impact the way people and society at large perceive her. However, she ends the quote above by stating she does not allow this reality to overpower her life.

Stella described the difficulties she faced as one of a few Mexican American women at Hawking University and even fewer in her subject field. In describing her journey to Sociology, she mentioned being influenced by Dr. Norma Williams. Stella took a Sociology class taught by Dr. Williams and was hooked. Stella mentioned the difficulties she faced in the Mathematics department at Hawking University including the unfortunate experience of asking for a letter of recommendation from a professor and

him declining to write one. Fortunately, she reached out to Dr. Norma Williams who was supportive and encouraged her to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociology. Stella followed her advice and was accepted to both Hawking University and Research One University, she chose the latter. Her negative racist and sexist experiences at Hawking University left her traumatized.

The women in this category are proud of their Mexican identities and also embraced their American identities. By stating this I am not arguing that the women in the first category did not appreciate the benefits of being American, (e.g. being U.S. born citizens, speaking English, etc.). Indeed they expressed a deep gratitude for their parents who sacrificed their lives to give them a better life. However the women in this category embraced their American identities in more explicit ways. Although most of the women that make up this category do not have a 100 percent grasp of the Spanish language, they nevertheless attempt to remain connected to their roots. Both groups above were also sympathetic to the immigrant struggle but not all women identify with the immigrant struggle.

### **“I’m American”**

Mary Ann, 27 years old, is a native Houstonian. She grew up with her mother and three siblings in a single parent household. Her mother’s family has been in the United States for many generations. Her paternal grandparents are from the Mexican state of San Luis Potosi. Her father speaks Spanish fluently and her mother also speaks it. Her parents did not teach their children Spanish and often spoke it when they discussed adult matters.



At the time of the interview, Mary Ann was working as a Manager in a clothing store in Houston, Texas. She had been looking and applying for Criminal Justice related jobs. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from State School University; however, she could not find a job in her career and was quite frustrated about her career uncertainty. When I asked Mary Ann to describe the biggest differences and similarities between Mexican and American cultures she answered:

*“You’re asking the wrong person. I didn’t really know a lot about Mexican traditions. I grew up with my mom so we didn’t really know about a lot of Mexican traditions...”*

I probed and asked her when she first realized she was of Mexican origin or when did this identity become salient for her. *“I don’t know”* she replied. I proceeded to ask: *“How do you view yourself?”* She answered: *“American. I was born here. I don’t know Spanish. I don’t really know anything about Mexican traditions or culture.”* I proceeded to ask: *“How does your role as a Mexican American woman impact your life?”* She replied: *“I don’t know. I haven’t really noticed an impact really. Except it’s harder to get jobs because I don’t know Spanish and I should.”* I asked: *“How does that make you feel?”* She replied:

*“Mad that I don’t know Spanish that they [my parents] didn’t teach it to me while growing up. I mean there are Mexicans that come into the store and automatically assume I know Spanish and I’m like nope... some of them give me dirty looks which makes me mad because I feel like they should know English. They’re here in the United States. If they just want to speak Spanish then they should have stayed in Mexico... I feel that people that know Spanish get hired over me. ”*

*“Why do you think that?”* I asked. She answered, *“Because the national language is Spanish over there and it’s not here.”* I probed, *“Does the U.S. have an official*

*language?*” and she answered, *“Yes it’s English.”* This conversation with Mary Ann clearly describes her as identifying with an American identity especially because she does not speak or understands Mexican traditions. She described her frustrations of not being able to find a job because she does not speak the Spanish language.

It is critical to point out that the United States does not have an official language at the federal level. However English is the most often spoken language in the United States. Certain states have listed English as their official language. Spanish is the second language that is most spoken in the United States, especially in the Southwestern states. The frustrations that Mary Ann expressed in her interview are far from few. Many have pushed the U.S. to adopt English as the official language. English Only Movements have existed throughout our history.

These frustrations expressed by Mary Ann have an impact in how she views herself as well as how she views Mexican immigrants. I asked Mary Ann, what are your opinions about unauthorized immigration to the U.S.? She stated:

*“If they want to come here so bad then they should come here legally. I don’t understand why people have to break the law to come here.”*

Mary Ann does not have first generation immigrant friends. She describes her friends as being mainly Hispanics. Some she says speak Spanish but others do not. Her views on immigration are black and white. Her understanding of entering the U.S. via legal means is limited. Mary Ann is not knowledgeable about immigration and the procedures needed to enter the U.S. legally. This can be attributed to her generation status, lack of knowledge of the Spanish language, and her lack of exposure with first generation immigrants. Her limited exposure and connection to the first generation has impacted her

experiences. The reality is that obtaining a visa to enter the U.S., especially for poor immigrants is extremely difficult. But Mary Ann's quote gets at the larger message of illegality: the criminalization of undocumented immigrants.

I also asked Mary Ann if she has ever faced discrimination in the U.S. and if so I asked her to please describe the experiences and how they have impacted her. She stated:

*"Well yeah people automatically assume that I know Spanish or even white people like they come to me as a translator like "don't you know Spanish?" No, I don't. Like if their trying to communicate with someone that is speaking Spanish."*

The theme of language comes up again. The automatic assumption that if one looks Brown, Mexican, or Latina/o more broadly, they should speak Spanish is real. The reality is that not all Mexican Americans speak Spanish for several reasons. In the interview I had with Mary Ann she stated that her parents did not teach her Spanish and used it as a method of privacy or when the adults wanted to have adult conversations. It served as a form of excluding the children from the conversation. Mary Ann acknowledges the frustrations she feels for not speaking Spanish and the impact it has had on her life. Yet she argues that she should not have to learn Spanish and instead Mexicans should learn English since they live in the United States.

Other participants from this section also agreed with this notion of immigrants learning English and the idea that they should adapt to U.S. expectations. The previous category, especially those that did not speak Spanish, also acknowledged the frustrations with the inability to fluently speak Spanish. However a difference between them and this current category is that they viewed speaking Spanish as an asset.

For instance, Gracie mentioned how beautiful it is to hear young Latina women who can dominate both languages. Gracie and Stella described the conscious decision made by their parents for not speaking Spanish. Given the discrimination their parents faced, their parents decided to raise their children speaking English. The idea was that they would dominate the English language and should lessen the discrimination they would feel. This is a common parenting practice theme among women of that era.

Mary Ann's quote and experiences demonstrate how she has been racialized by other Mexican immigrants and whites as being expected to speak Spanish. Unfortunately the racist oppression that Mexican Americans faced historically created the idea that in order to protect their children from discrimination, they must teach their children only English. However, this did not shield them from discrimination. There is a disconnect between Mexican immigrants and U.S.-born Mexican Americans understandings of race relations in the United States.

Mexican immigrants often do not understand the history of oppression that Mexican Americans have had to endure in the United States. Therefore, it is often that Mexican immigrants associate Mexican Americans that do not speak Spanish as being ashamed of their roots. This creates antagonism and conflict within the group. Similarly, whites automatically assume that all Brown, Mexican, or Latina/os speak Spanish. It is often that the Spanish language is viewed as "you should know it." This sends a message of "you're not from here." It is not often viewed as an asset but as an expectation. However if a white person speaks Spanish then it is viewed positively and as an asset.

## **Racialization Experiences – Perceived and Treated as Outsiders**

Adela tells me of a very disturbing experience. It was during her undergraduate years. She worked as a cashier at a grocery store in a college town. When I asked her if she felt accepted by the larger society given her Mexican American identity, she describes:

*“It depends on the situation. I think that once they know my background and where I am educated the conversation turns different. But if they don’t know like at Hawking University, once I started wearing my school ring. Oh people would talk “oh you are a Hawking University student?” all the white people but prior to that they were like “I need to speak to somebody who speaks English.” I speak English. They would like if I didn’t exist...there were really racist people that I encountered working there but once I got that ring and that was my protection that was like my in. ... Education is like your calling card. Your recommender. But if they don’t know, they don’t assume that you went to college, they assume that you don’t speak English.”*

Adela’s experience demonstrates how the expectation to speak Spanish can be a form of discrimination. This new form of discrimination conflates race with legal status and immigrant association. It sends a larger message of “you are not from here” “you do not belong.” Building on the argument I made in the previous section, in today’s anti-immigrant climate there is an expectation that all Mexicans speak Spanish. This expectation of Mexicans speaking Spanish is also made by Mexican immigrants. For whites it indicates a form of otherness and forever foreigner notions. For Mexican immigrants it indicates being ashamed of our ancestors and racial and ethnic identities. This is a racialized experience because when whites speak Spanish it is viewed as an asset, as being educated. On the other hand when Mexican Americans speak Spanish it is viewed as an expectation given our Mexican-origin, yet conflating race, generation status, and legal status.

Adela's experience also shows the intersections of race, gender, immigration status, and education. It is a perfect example that demonstrates education is not the great equalizer. Although it could be a form of a temporary shield against racism, it will not always work. The Hawking University ring, which is a big pride among students and alumni, serves as her mask or shield in a predominately white and racist space. Yet it was very clear and obvious the treatment she felt prior to her getting her ring.

Antonia shared a similar experience with me. She explained she was in a small vehicle collision. No one was hurt but there was minor damage to her car. The person she hit was a 40 year old white male. She explained being dressed in a T-shirt, jeans, and tennis shoes and she was right around the corner of her house. Yet the 40 year old white male did not believe she lived in the neighborhood given his disbelief and further questioning. Antonia explained:

*"it was so obvious until he walked over with me to get my license plate number and I have an Ivy League Alumni sticker. "Oh you went to Ivy League University?" He asked me. "Yes I did." The tone of his voice and the way he treated me totally changed after that. He was like "okay don't worry, we don't have to call the police"*

Adela was saved by her Hawking University ring while Antonia was saved by her Ivy League Alumni sticker. Unfortunately both have to deal with the unpleasant experiences of being racialized. While these tangible items, a ring and a sticker, do not mean much the status they carry often shields people of color from being further racialized. However it is not a permanent shield or mask and in fact these tangible items demonstrate how deep and real racism continues to play out in our everyday experiences

given the obvious reactions of how people perceive and treat you once your educational attainment is revealed.

In discussing how an anti-immigrant sentiment complicates the boundaries of what it means to be a Mexican American and their views on Mexican immigrants today, I find that a deportation threat, exacerbated by an anti-immigrant climate serves to racialize immigrants and U.S.-born Mexican Americans. Gracie said the following regarding the anti-immigrant climate that permeates our current society:

*“I think there’s been such an anti-immigrant stance... I mean every time something happens the comments from the newspaper you always hear “go back to Mexico” give me a break... It’s ridiculous just like the whole mentality of ask me for my papers. “What papers do you want, do you want my degrees, my mortgage, my car title?”*

In the interview, Gracie was very critical of the Republican Party, immigration reform, and anti-immigration states like Arizona. She acknowledged how critical her son is of Obama for the high rates of deportation under his presidency. Yet she sees the situation as *“it could be worse.”* The quote above indicates how widespread anti-immigrant sentiments are highly visible on online newspaper comments. As she spoke about Arizona, she mentioned the absurdity of anti-immigrant policies that spread a mentality of *“ask me for my papers.”*

This anti-immigrant notion conflates legal status, race, and nativity. It sends a wider message that Mexican immigrants are not wanted. Moreover, it fans a deportation threat that impacts the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American community at a much wider level. Given that Mexican Americans are often racialized themselves or perceived to be undocumented, an anti-immigrant climate impacts the community widely. In

further demonstrating how Mexican Americans are racialized in today's anti-immigrant climate, Bernice explains:

*"I realize that I'm shielded from all of this but unfortunately when a person comes here you are not a person, you are Mexican. I think it will change but unfortunately you are not seen as a person, a worker, or as a contributor. Mexicans are seen as Mexicans. "*

Bernice's statement gets at the heart of how deep rooted and dehumanizing the experience of being viewed as only a Mexican. In her quote she is referring specifically to immigrant Mexicans that are negatively impacted by the idea of what it means to be a Mexican today. Particularly in a time in which being Mexican can be considered something suspicious, undesirable, and devalued, it is critical to further question the negative implications a constant threat of deportation has on the mental health outcomes of Mexican Americans. Before addressing this last question I end this section with a very sad example that demonstrates how Mexican Americans are perceived as deportable, immigrants, and undesirable. I asked Stella, do you feel that the larger U.S. society accepts or welcomes Mexicans to the U.S.? Please explain why or why not you think this.

*"... I think there's this huge push to not welcome Mexican Americans even if you were born and raised here and the perfect example is this little boy who sang the national anthem at the NBA playoffs. The first day he sang and the backlash "why are we letting this Mexican?; why is this wetback?; send him back to Mexico"... So I think there are people here who still are uncomfortable with Mexicans and other Latinos who have a view of us as immigrants, "we're all here illegally, we don't belong here, what are we doing here?..." "*

Stella is referring to Sebastien De La Cruz also known as "El Charro de Oro" (The Golden Mariachi), an 11 year old San Antonio native Texan. He sang the national anthem at Game 3 of the NBA finals. Just as Stella mentioned above, he sang



beautifully. Yet this incident created anti-immigrant and racist comments through various social media sites. Stella connects this incident with the larger message it sends. A message that states clearly Mexicans are not Americans, Mexicans are not welcomed, and Mexicans should be deported.

The image is that all Mexicans are “illegal.” This shows that Mexican Americans face racism not only because of their race and ethnic social position but also because of their perceived foreignness and illegality. Previous research has shown the detrimental impacts racism has on people of color mental health and physical health. Yet this new form of racism and discrimination that immigrants and Mexican Americans are facing deserves more attention.

### **From a Deportation Threat to Depressive Symptoms**

How does such a pervasive anti-immigrant climate impact the mental health outcomes of Mexican American women? I argue that Mexican American women continue to experience a deportation threat making them susceptible to depressive symptoms. Similar to the documented Mexican immigrant women in the previous chapter, I find Mexican American women also experience undocumented vicariousness. The difference between documented Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican American women is that Mexican Americans should be protected from the actual act of deportation given they were born in the United States. However, there have been cases where U.S.-born Mexican Americans have also been deported (Golash-Boza 2012). A deportation threat impacts all three categories of Mexican American women I have interviewed in various ways.

## **Deportation Threats, Undocumented Vicariousness, and Mental Health**

A deportation threat remains strong given the anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican climate, which fans a racialization process where immigrants, regardless of legal status or not, are perceived and treated as undocumented immigrants. The previous sections discussed in this chapter demonstrate how the devaluation of what it means to be of Mexican-origin today impacts Mexican American women's identity. By showing how this impacts their identities, I argue it provides a more universal way in which a deportation threat can contribute to depressive symptoms among all Mexican Americans.

The previous chapter also shows how a notion of presumed illegality creates a deportation threat for documented Mexican immigrant women. Race, legality, nativity, generation status, are further conflated as the narratives from this chapter on Mexican American women have demonstrated. Ample research shows the detrimental impacts racism and perceived discrimination have on the physical and mental health outcomes of people of color (Brondolo et al. 2009; Williams et al. 2003; Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams and Sternthal 2010). However, less is known about how undocumented legal status further complicates this relationship (Joseph 2011; Viruell-Fuentes 2007).

I argue that the mental health literature must also examine legal status as another indicator of inequality impacting not only the immigrant population but also the U.S.-born Mexican-origin population's mental health. Research questions should move towards critically examining how legal status impacts the health outcomes of the Mexican-origin community. It is critical to connect these literatures as the health literatures have shown how racism negatively impacts the health of people of color.

However, racism exacerbated by a threat of deportation and an anti-immigrant climate must also be examined.

Future research questions should move away from focusing on solving puzzles like the Latino Health Paradox to further disentangling this puzzle. This can be done by investigating how undocumented status and the devaluation of Mexicans impacts their identities and intra-ethnic relations. It is critical to connect how Mexican American women continue to face a pervasive deportation threat that transcends U.S.-born citizenship given the current anti-immigrant climate that devalues Mexicans.

#### **Undocumented Vicariousness: U.S.-born Mexican American Women**

Similar to the documented Mexican immigrant women's experiences, I find Mexican American women also experience *undocumented vicariousness*. However it plays out in the lives of Mexican American women a bit differently such as those that are: 1) members of mixed-status families; 2) married or have a romantic partner that is undocumented; and/or 3) identify with the plight of the undocumented immigrant experience (View Appendix K).

It is critical to note that a deportation threat is not constant but is variable and therefore can be explained in a continuum with direct and indirect impacts on the Mexican American women from this study. The three categories I have discussed are not mutually exclusive. Some of the women fit all three categories. For example, women that have undocumented family members or undocumented romantic partners also identify with the plight of the undocumented immigrant experience given the impact undocumented status has had on their lives. Given this reality, the categories delineated

are not mutually exclusive. However, delineating these categories allows fruitful theoretical and analytical findings.

Although I find both the documented Mexican immigrant women and the Mexican American women experience *undocumented vicariousness*, there is a critical difference in how *undocumented vicariousness* unfolds between these two groups. The major differences between how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out for these two groups relates to the: 1) absence of undocumented dating/marriage partners for the documented Mexican immigrant compared to the Mexican American women; and 2) the experiential knowledge associated with Mexican Americans not living as undocumented immigrants themselves. Yet both groups experience *undocumented vicariousness* indirectly through a pervasive deportation threat which impacts their mental health.

More specifically, Mexican American women are more likely to marry/date undocumented Mexican immigrant men whereas the women from the documented Mexican immigrant sample were mainly wives of other documented immigrant men or married a U.S. citizen and legalized their status that way. Hondagneu-Sotelo's typology of family migration provides an interesting and nuanced way in which illegality and marriage intersect. In other words, because most women fit the family stage migration and the family unit migration trajectories, they were not single in the United States to marry other undocumented immigrants. On the other hand, Mexican American women had the opportunity to date and marry other undocumented Mexican immigrant men. This area of research deserves more scholarly attention. I use the stories of Betty, Elena, and Margarita as examples of how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out for them.

### **Betty: Mexican American Woman Impacted by Deportations in Family**

Betty, 28 years old, a high school Spanish teacher moved to Houston in 2007 after graduating with a Bachelor degree in Criminal Justice and Spanish from a nearby university. She was born and raised in Pharr, Texas. Betty's mother was born in the United States and her father was born in the state of Nuevo León, Mexico.

Betty's mother was born in the United States and her father was born in the state of Nuevo Leon Mexico. Her parents met and married in Mexico. When I inquired further about how many generations her mother's family has lived in the United States, Betty said she could not provide an answer. As far as she knows her mother's family has been in the United States for a long time, however, they have close ties with family in Mexico too. Indeed Betty told me her mother speaks little English and her father speaks even less of it. Given that Betty's mother was born in the United States, she submitted the paperwork for her husband to enter the United States legally after they were married.

Betty is the 8th child of a total of nine children. As a migrant family that worked in the fields they traveled constantly. They lived in Wyoming, Minnesota, and Michigan, to name a few states. The family stopped working as fieldworkers when Betty was born but once she turned 11 years old, they continued working in the fields. Betty worked with her family until she was 16 years old. Of this experience she told me:

*"Some people see us as less because we're fieldworkers but at the same time we are more because we know how difficult it is to earn money the honest way. We also know how to work with our hands and we're not afraid to work hard. If you can work in the field and get through it then you can work anywhere else and you're gonna be fine."*

In our interview, Betty described how her experiences of working in the fields also impacted her racial and ethnic identity formation. She views herself as a Chicana and a Mexican American woman. She describes:

*“I’m proud that I’m Mexican American but I’m also proud that I am from the United States but of Mexican descent because I have the best of both worlds. The traditions, the values, the principles of the Mexican culture but I also have the determination and the hard working I can achieve anything I put my mind to [mindset] and the resources to do it of being an American.”*

This quote above captures a dominant theme that was described by all participants regardless of how they racially identified themselves. Everyone felt grateful to have been born on this side of the border, the United States. The main reason for this is because of all the opportunities they have had as U.S. citizens compared to their parents, family members that are currently undocumented residing in the U.S. or those that currently live in Mexico. Opportunities they described ranged from less poverty to access to higher education as they compared living in the United States to Mexico.

The undocumented and documented immigrants also admired the United States for their progressiveness towards women’s rights. It is essential to point out that some of the Mexican American women did articulate their citizenship as a privileged position. At times it provided guilt especially when they came from mixed-status families or had close friendships with undocumented friends. But only those that also closely identified with their Mexican identities discussed how proud it made them feel to also be Mexican.

Although Betty did not grow up with undocumented family members she does have extended family members and close friends that are undocumented. Yet her family still faced the impacts of a deportation. Her father, whom I will call Don Ramon, a legal

permanent resident was deported. He had gotten into trouble for drug dealing years before (and had served his time). Betty called the detention center he was sent to a prison. She tells me:

*“My dad was 67 or 68 when he went to prison. He was used to being in a quiet place and there was a whole bunch of Jamaicans that wouldn’t be quiet, day and night, dancing and screaming. He went to the hospital 3 or 4 times and then he just decided that he was going to sign his voluntary deportation because he was getting sick from not being able to sleep. He was going mental.”*

Don Ramon was detained for an entire year until the conditions became unbearable. Because Don Ramon signed a voluntary deportation order, Betty’s family cannot do anything to bring him back to the United States. Don Ramon is now 75 years old and lives in Mexico. Betty described how his deportation impacted her family:

*“It affected my mom a lot. she has to ride the bus for 2 or 3 hours... She can barely walk, she uses a cane. She has diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, osteoporosis and she has to wait for my dad who uses crutches because he can’t walk to pick her up from the bus stop... It has affected my mother and us [their children] because medicine is expensive.”*

In our interview, Betty explained that her father has cancer. Betty described what her father told her about the cancer: *“If I wouldn’t have stopped [smoking] then maybe I wouldn’t have cancer, and I’m like no maybe you would have just not found out.”* Don Ramon was a smoker and while in the detention center he was not allowed to smoke. The cancer was not detected in the detention center but it was detected soon after being deported to Mexico.

Betty described how her father’s deportation coupled with the cancer has negatively impacted her family. Her top worries now are not being able to provide for her parents. Her mother is disabled and her father is also very ill and now must live in

Mexico. It's evident that her mother who spends most of her time with her father is also impacted by the deportation.

Through Betty's example, we can see how undocumented vicariousness plays out and the impacts deportations create for families. Although Don Ramon experienced the actual act of being deported and removed from the United States, his story adds to the numbers of other legal permanent residents that have been deported for retroactive crimes. It shows that it is not only the undocumented population who can be impacted by deportations. This example adds to the reality that all noncitizens can be deported transforming a "legal" status to an "illegal" status (Golash-Boza 2014).

**Elena: Mexican American Woman and Undocumented Husband and Partner**

Elena, 28 years old, was born and raised in Houston, Texas. At the time of the interview, Elena was expecting her first child. She and her husband were in the process of closing on a house.

Elena grew up in a predominately Mexican *barrio* on the East side of Houston. She is the fourth child of a total of nine children and lived with her mother, step-father, and siblings. Elena attended Public University and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Management. Making it out of the *barrio* and being a first-generation college student makes Elena proud. In our interview, she described how college as a young child was not an option for her. *"I've noticed that when we were in grade school, we didn't know what college was to us. When we were in middle school we were thinking about graduating high school not graduating and going to college"* she explained. This unfortunate reality is the norm for those that grow up in her neighborhood.



Growing up Elena spoke English in the home and at school. Her mother, step-father, grandparents, uncles, and aunts spoke Spanish fluently. Today Elena speaks Spanish. She credits learning it from her husband who spoke mainly Spanish and very little English when they first met. Today, her husband whom I will call Jose speaks more English. They met at work and began dating. Elena worked in the office and Jose worked outside doing labor. They both worked for a male-dominated labor company. They began dating and several months into their relationship Jose proposed to Elena.

Elena explained to me that Jose was the first Mexican immigrant she dated. Prior to meeting her husband she dated Mexican Americans from her neighborhood. She tells me: *"I didn't know that he was undocumented. That was something that we didn't even discuss until we actually got to know each other."* I asked her how the conversation emerged. She answered:

*"When we were going out, you ask [about], you know, your mom or your dad. He would only talk about his dad. I was like, 'Oh, where's your mom?' He goes, 'She's in Mexico.' I go, 'Oh, does she come over here? Is she visiting somebody over there?' He's like, 'No, my family lives over there.' I was like, 'Oh'. And I was like, ummm. 'So then you can go there and visit them?' and he goes 'No.' I mean, it was just a normal conversation and I was just thinking, umm. And then I told my mom, my mom said, 'Then he doesn't have papers.' And I'm like, 'Oh well, I don't care' like I didn't care. I didn't know what came with that prize. I didn't know the whole challenge that I was gonna have to go through about getting his residency. I didn't know and that was the last thing on my mind but it was an experience but at the same time it was worth it."*

Elena did not care about his undocumented status and accepted to marry Jose. It was through meeting Jose that Elena learned about the precarious position that undocumented status had on her then fiancé's life. Given this reality they decided to marry at the court house and start the immigration petition procedures soon after.

Because Elena did not know many first generation or undocumented immigrants, she was not able to connect Jose's inability to travel to Mexico with being an undocumented immigrant. However as she shared this story with her mother, and given her mother's personal experience with Elena's biological father, her mother grew wary of Jose's true intentions. As we talked about her family's reactions to her marriage with Jose, she said that at first some of the family had mixed feelings but that now they all realize how great Jose is to her. Perhaps these mixed feelings were a result of Jose's mother's personal experience. Elena explained:

*"... my mom told me to be careful and that she didn't want me to get hurt and she didn't want me to fall for a person and then maybe they didn't mean anything, you know, under good intentions... My mom was just making sure that she told me everything that happened with her. She was like, "Just make sure you don't end up in the same situation that I was. Where you get married, apply for residency, but then you figure out, hey, there are kids and there's a wife on the other side." And I mean, it's sad but it's true... My dad is an example. He had a family over there. He had children and a wife in Mexico City waiting for him..."*

Unfortunately that idea of "marrying for papers" is a common notion among some of the Mexican origin community. This phenomenon extends to other immigrant groups as well. Elena described and understood her mother's concern especially since Elena's father had a wife and family in Mexico. Therefore, Elena appreciated her mother sharing her struggles. However, unfortunately, this notion of "marrying for papers" can also serve as a stigma or an additional burden that the undocumented population must deal with from their partner's family and friends. For example, Elena explained that it was common for her to get asked if she was marrying her husband in exchange for money. She explained to me:

*“I got so many people approach me about me and my husband. They thought I was going to get like ten thousand dollars from him or more money and they thought that I was only in it for some money... Like people at school I was, like I told you, I was depressed. I was sad and they were like, “What’s the matter?” I’d say, “Well my husband is in Mexico.” And I was explaining that to them and they would go, “Oh, how much money are you gonna get?”... I was like, “No, not here, I’m not doing that.”*

Elena and Jose’s marriage was further questioned by Elena’s friends and acquaintances at school. The common assumption of “marrying for papers” is problematic. It questions the legitimacy of Elena and Jose’s marriage and love for each other. This questioning was not only among close family and friends/acquaintances circles but extends to government officials too. The quote above refers to the time in which Jose was sent to Mexico and asked to wait for his date to appear in Juarez, Mexico. Elena explained that this was a very tough time in her life because she was not sure if her husband’s residency would be approved. This created so much stress and anxiety in her life that she fell into a depression. She states:

*“The time that I felt more depressed was when my husband left to Mexico and I didn’t know if he was gonna come back... I locked out everybody... I stayed home and I’m just like I have to go to school but at the same time I was depressed because I didn’t know if he was gonna come back...”*

For Elena being separated from her husband coupled with the uncertainty due to immigration procedures contributed to her depression. Elena began to withdraw from her friends and family. The uncertainty she faced stemmed from the immigration petition procedures. Unaware if her husband’s immigration petition application would be approved or denied and the impact this decision had over the rest of their lives created a lot of distress. Elena’s quote above demonstrates the theme of the *undocumented vicariousness* that some Mexican Americans live.

Again I define *undocumented vicariousness* as the broader implications undocumented status has on the lives of U.S.-born Mexican Americans. It shows how issues related to the undocumented experience extend beyond the undocumented population especially if they are married to an undocumented immigrant.

In our interview, I asked Elena if she felt she belonged in the United States. Elena explained how sometimes she feels she does not belong in the U.S. because of the way her husband is treated. She describes:

*“At first I didn’t have a problem when I was single but when I got married... you’d be surprised how when you’re trying to travel... if I was traveling by myself to Mexico with my U.S passport, I have no problem coming back... But when I bring my husband with us, it’s always like, they hold us back. They question him, who am I, why is he coming back over here, and how did he get his residency? And it’s not only this one time, it’s every time we go to Mexico. So yeah I do feel that I belong here, but at the same time now that I am married to my husband and he is Mexican I don’t...”*

The quote above describes Elena’s frustration with U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents at the airports that always stop her husband to question him. The questions are not simply about Jose’s life but involve Elena too. This shows how, regardless of obtaining residency, Jose is still viewed as foreign. The message is clear: having documents is not enough. Although Jose has residency, he is still viewed and treated as not belonging. Their marriage is also viewed as suspect and illegitimate. Elena views this experience as an example of how, by association and relationship to her husband, she does not belong. The inquisition that her husband undergoes each time they travel has an impact on Elena’s life too. Other participants also shared similar sentiments when they traveled via airplane or by car in dealing with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Border Patrol agents.

In the interview, Elena also shared with me Jose's interactions with the Border Patrol agents when he first attempted to enter the U.S. clandestinely. She said:

*“And he's told me stories, many of the time where these people would beat them up. You know people don't give them food. My husband said that there's been about a couple of days that, when they got them, when he was trying to cross over, ICE (sic) [border patrol] took him and, I mean, they literally beat him up. I mean they beat him up so bad that he was like he said it was so bad that he couldn't breathe. And he wasn't doing anything.”*

Unfortunately the brutality Jose faced while attempting to enter the United States clandestinely is not a one-time incident. The United States Border Patrol has a history of abuse that ignores the constitutional and legal rights of immigrants and U.S. citizens. This abuse manifests in various ways such as use of excessive force, unlawful searches and seizures, racially motivated arrests, inhumane conditions for those detained, and use of coercion, deception, and misinformation to remove people from the United States (Martínez, Cantor, and Ewing 2014). Rosalinda's story, from the previous chapter, is another example of how the border patrol lied and deceived her from entering the United States.

One of the most recent cases has been documented by the National Public Radio entitled: “U.S. Border Patrol's Response to Violence in Question.” It discusses the death of Guillermo Arevalo, a Mexican national, who was shot by a Border Patrol agent in September of 2012. According to the Border Patrol agency, Guillermo was throwing rocks but witnesses' state otherwise. The Border Patrol is currently under investigation for Guillermo's death.

The American Immigration Council recently published a report shedding light on the lack of accountability and lack of transparency on the U.S. Border Patrol and the

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) also known as the parent agency. 809 complaints of supposed abuse between January 2009 and January 2012 were analyzed. These complaints ranged from physical, sexual, and verbal abuse. Findings show that from the complaints in which a formal decision was made a startling 97% resulted in “No Action Taken” (Martínez et al. 2014).

The story of Elena and Jose exemplifies undocumented vicariousness that a U.S.-born Mexican American women experience. These experiences not only impact the life of the undocumented but also impact the lives of those most close to them. As Elena and Jose’s love grew, Elena learned of the struggles associated with the life of an undocumented immigrant. Being well aware of the increased deportations and raids throughout the city of Houston (and throughout the U.S.), Elena made it a top priority to begin the immigration paperwork for Jose. Afraid of a constant deportation threat that Jose faced, they attempted to expedite the immigration petition procedures by hiring an attorney. The process began in 2007 soon after they married and cost them approximately \$8,000. In describing the process Elena said to me:

*“When I filled that paperwork, I mean it was so much and so intense that I cried like every other day in thinking, “Why do you need so much from me?” ... In a minute of a heartbeat, their one meeting, they can reject all of that. They’ll tell you “no.” ... I don’t know why they make it so hard.”*

Elena lived *undocumented vicariously* given the distress associated with a deportation threat her husband lived. This took a toll on her mental health and ultimately contributed to her exhibiting depressive symptoms. Her depressive symptoms resulted from the uncertainty associated with the undocumented status of her husband. Today Elena and Jose continue to be happily married and have a beautiful baby girl. They have

moved into their new home. Although Jose is a legal resident of the United States, he continues to face a racialization process that lumps him under the category of undocumented immigrant. Next I introduce Margarita to elucidate Mexican American women that identify with the plight of the undocumented experience.

### **Margarita: Identifying with the Plight of the Undocumented Experience**

Margarita, 57 years old, is a mother of three children and has two grandchildren she adores. She is a third generation Mexican American woman that was born and raised in Houston, Texas. While growing up she lived with her parents and seven siblings. Her father was a tailor and owned his own business. He was well liked by many and donated money to the local Catholic church. Her mother was also well regarded and had a very giving heart.

Growing up Margarita experienced racism and discrimination. She described the white flight her neighborhood underwent as Mexicans began to move in. Today, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans make up the demographics of this neighborhood. Growing up she was often picked on at school for being Mexican. Her father had been shot at and their car was torched in front of their house. I asked Margarita about her first memories of when she realized she was of Mexican-origin, she replied:

*“I knew in my 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year in school. When I used to hear the phrase “you dumb Mexican.” That was one of the ones I hated. That used to tick me off. I would tell them “I guess we are both dumb since you are in the same grade I am.”*

Margarita told me that she talked back because she never let anyone mess with her.

Margarita speaks very little Spanish given that her parents come from a generation in which they faced more pronounced racism for speaking Spanish and therefore did not teach their children Spanish. However, Margarita described how out of all her siblings she is the only one that does not speak Spanish fluently. I inquired further asking why and she explained that her siblings chose careers working with Spanish speaking Hispanics.

Although Margarita does not have close family members or friends that are first-generation immigrants, she described going to Mexico when she was younger with her family. Recalling on these experiences, she said she knew she was very lucky to live in the United States. It was a sad experience to see children her age and the conditions they lived under. Regardless of the fact that Margarita does not have a close family connection with the immigration population she remains very proud to be of Mexican descent and also identifies with the plight of the undocumented population. For example, when I asked her, when someone mentions the topic immigration, what automatically comes to your mind, she answered:

*“That is a word I don’t like because we have so many different people in this world, yet they are picking on Hispanic people coming over to try to make a good life for themselves. Yet they make them do the dirty work and they still want to kick them out... It gets me mad that the patrol people are bringing them back or shooting them... They are not doing no harm... If they are going to let everyone else come in then why not Hispanics?... I’m pretty sure there are a lot people that come out here with no papers. But it’s funny how they target the Hispanic people. Why the Hispanic people? That’s what I get mad about.”*

Margarita sometimes used the words Mexican and Hispanic interchangeably. The quotes above show that Margarita believes Hispanics are being picked on while there are other immigrant groups that may also be undocumented. In other words she points to the



critical reality which perpetuates an assumption that undocumented immigrant is synonymous with Hispanic and shows the conflation of race and legal status. Her quote also describes some of the abuse that undocumented immigrants face when they are apprehended by border patrol agents. Her quote also shows how Hispanics do the dirty work that other people do not want to do. Later in the interview I probed further and asked Margarita why she thought Hispanics were targeted, she answered:

*“Stupidity hatred, downgrading people because of their race or color and I don’t like the way the States treat people that come over. I’ve seen immigration come to the apartment complex there and you just see everybody running. That’s sad. What is the purpose?...”*

This quote above describes Margarita’s frustration with how immigrants are treated today. She herself has seen first-hand ICE officials going to her apartment complex and the impact it has on the immigrant community. Again she expresses her frustration with how immigrant officials tend to focus on Hispanics. She includes herself in this category when she asks: *“They after us for a reason, why?”* She cannot explain why it is that Hispanics are the main target of anti-immigrant sentiment and the raids she has seen.

Although Margarita does not have any close associations or social ties with undocumented Mexican immigrants, she continues to understand their plight. In her interview, she talked about how first-generation immigrants are treated at work (she is a school bus driver) or she sees the ways other people talk about immigrants. She often expresses her views and advocates for immigrants.

Even if Margarita is not directly impacted by undocumented vicariousness in a clear way that a deportation threat impacts those of mixed-status households, or those with a romantic partner that is undocumented, or those that have close friends and loved

ones that are undocumented, she continues to face frustration by the way her community is perceived and targeted. Therefore, she continues to face a deportation threat but an indirect way. Her heart goes out for those who are undocumented and families that are torn apart but she is not directly impacted by it. However, Margarita discussed how all Hispanics are targeted as immigrants. She did not distinguish between those who are undocumented, documented, or U.S.-born. This gets at the core issue of “illegality” that often conflates legal status, race, and nativity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the experiences of Mexican American women. Some of the women were born and raised in Houston, Texas while others were born in other U.S. cities. All participants were interviewed in Houston, Texas and at the time of the interview had to be residing in the Houston area. The main argument this chapter makes is that Mexican American women experience a deportation threat. The argument builds on the previous chapter which focused on the documented Mexican immigrant women. A deportation threat extends to the entire community in two ways.

First, given the current anti-immigrant climate, being Mexican today is often associated with an immigrant identity (Golash-Boza 2012). Moreover, being a Mexican immigrant is often equated with being undocumented (Golash-Boza 2012). This exists regardless of being born in the United States and regardless of generation status. Given this reality, the notion of what it means to be Mexican today is highly contingent by the political climate and anti-immigrant climate.

I argue that the pervasiveness of how Mexicans are viewed in the United States, today namely as “illegal” and “criminal,” have detrimental impacts on the mental health of the community at large. More specifically, the devaluation of what it means to be of Mexican-origin today and how this impacts Mexican American women’s identity provides a more universal way of describing how undocumented status can contribute to depressive symptoms among Mexican Americans.

Secondly, given that many Mexican American women are connected with the undocumented population, they too are impacted by a deportation threat their undocumented family, friends, and loved ones face. For example, participants that are of mixed status families, have an undocumented romantic partner, and/or participants that identify with the plight of the undocumented experience, are also impacted by the brunt of a constant deportation threat.

The findings from this chapter show a new form of discrimination that is not simply due to being Mexican but highly interconnected with legal status. My research pushes scholars to move beyond the black/white binary. Moreover, this research marries race, immigration, and mental health literatures arguing for an intersectional approach that critically highlights legal status as another marker of stratification. Finally this chapter sheds light on how illegality impacts Mexican American women’s depressive symptoms.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION

This dissertation contributes to the growing interest on illegality and its impacts on immigrant mental health disparities by using an intersectionality approach. It sheds light on how legal status is socially constructed and racialized. Moreover, this research demonstrates how this impacts their vulnerability to experiencing depressive symptoms. The aims of this dissertation were to merge immigration and mental health literatures.

Findings from this dissertation argue for undocumented status to be considered as another maker of inequality and stratification. It also argues that illegality and its consequences extend beyond the undocumented population to the Mexican-origin, or those that appear to be Mexicans, community through what I call *undocumented vicariousness*. Findings also contribute to research on identity and belonging, racialization, deportation threats, microaggressions, and mental health. The research questions guiding this study are:

- (1) In the context of a negative societal reception, how does illegality shape Mexican-origin women's mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?
- (2) How do intersectional identities rooted in race, ethnicity, class, legal status, and nativity affect Mexican-origin women's incorporation processes and their mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?

These questions aim to elucidate the growing interest in immigrant and ethnic group health disparities by focusing on the relationship between two understudied aspects of identity that shape Mexican origin women's incorporation experiences. This study

explores how the lived experiences of unauthorized, authorized immigrant and Mexican American women shape mental health outcomes across legal status and nativity.

### **Research Findings**

My research generates several major substantive findings. I observe that Mexican-origin women's susceptibility to depressive symptoms is shaped by several factors. By contextualizing my case within a negative context of reception, namely calling attention to illegality and the anti-immigrant sentiment prevalent today, I show that this context sets a stage that includes factors that contribute to Mexican-origin women's depressive symptoms. For example, in this negative reception context, the threat of deportation manifests differently across legal status and nativity. In other words, undocumented status matters and has real material consequences on the undocumented individual, family, and community at large (View Appendix G).

First, my findings reveal that "unauthorized status" is a salient aspect of identity that greatly impedes Mexican immigrant women's social and economic incorporation, thereby contributing to depressive symptoms in marked ways. Specifically, findings revealed that Mexican immigrant women's unauthorized status is directly impacted by a deportation threat that contributes to: 1) a constant fear of deportation; 2) family fragmentation; and 3) economic uncertainty (View Appendix H). I argue that these negative feelings and experiences are associated with depressive symptomatology.

These findings are consistent with their more vulnerable and precarious status. The relationship between undocumented legal status and depressive symptoms is directly impacting the undocumented Mexican immigrant women compared to the

indirect ways it impacts documented and the U.S.-born Mexican American women. It does so by fanning a deportation threat that the undocumented women directly feel, and documented women and U.S.-born Mexican American women indirectly feel.

Documented and U.S.-born Mexican American women experience a deportation threat through what I call undocumented vicariousness. This also impacts their mental health.

I define a deportation threat not by the mere act of being forced out or removed from a country but instead by the threat or presumed threat of being targeted for deportation in the United States. My research is highly motivated by De Genova (2002) push to study the deportability, or the susceptibility of deportation rather than the act of deportation. A deportation threat therefore does not only impact the undocumented population but it also impacts the entire Mexican community, or those that appear to be Mexicans.

Similar to a deportation threat, I focus on the susceptibility or vulnerability to experiencing depressive symptoms not as the actual act of being clinically diagnosed with depression. The hyper-vigilance and threats that the Mexican-origin women face due to a racialization process and deportation threats, I argue, wears these bodies down contributing to depressive symptoms.

Second, undocumented status transcends beyond the undocumented population extending to the documented Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican American women. It does so in what I call *undocumented vicariousness*. I define *undocumented vicariousness* as the extended consequences undocumented status has on the lives of documented Mexican immigrant women and U.S.-born Mexican American women.

*Undocumented vicariousness* demonstrates how issues related to the undocumented experience have collateral consequences on the community.

*Undocumented vicariousness* plays out in the lives of documented Mexican immigrant women that are: 1) members of mixed-status families; and/or 2) have experiential knowledge having once lived as an undocumented immigrant themselves thus making them empathetic to the plight of the undocumented experience. The third description demonstrates the lasting impacts illegality has on people's mental health. I find that some documented Mexican immigrant women are indirectly impacted by undocumented status through a deportation threat. These women continue to face a deportation threat by association. Ultimately, this takes a toll on their mental health causing them to exhibit depressive symptoms (View Appendix I).

Third, I find undocumented status continues to impact the lives of U.S.-born Mexican American women. Similar to the documented Mexican immigrant women's experiences, I find Mexican American women also experience *undocumented vicariousness*. However it plays out in the lives of Mexican American women a bit differently such as those that are: 1) members of mixed-status families; 2) married or have a romantic partner that is undocumented; and/or 3) identify with the plight of the undocumented immigrant experience.

The major differences between how *undocumented vicariousness* plays out for the documented Mexican immigrant women compared to the Mexican American women relates to the 1) absence of dating/marriage partners that are undocumented for the documented Mexican immigrant women compared to the Mexican American women;

and 2) the experiential knowledge associated with Mexican Americans not living as undocumented immigrants themselves. Mexican American women, similar to the documented Mexican immigrant women, experience undocumentedness indirectly through a pervasive deportation threat. This also has negative impacts on Mexican American women's depressive symptoms.

It is critical to note that a deportation threat is not constant but is variable and therefore can be explained in a continuum with direct and indirect impacts on the Mexican-origin women from this study. Having laid out these clear modes of experiencing undocumented vicariousness, for both documented and Mexican American women, it is imperative to stress that these modes of experience are not mutually exclusive. There are times in which women fit all three descriptions. Other times women may fit two yet others may fit only one. For example, women that have undocumented family members or undocumented romantic partners also identify with the plight of the undocumented immigrant experience given the impact undocumented status has had on their lives. Nevertheless there are some documented and Mexican American women that do not experience a deportation threat in the ways outlined above.

Some documented immigrant and Mexican American women may not be directly impacted by the lives of the undocumented. Those that do not associate themselves with the immigrant population and thus do not stress out about a deportation threat, I argue are still impacted. These women are nonetheless impacted at a wider level by a racialization process that impacts all Mexican-origin women regardless of their direct ties with the undocumented community. This is indicative of how a deportation threat



extends to the entire Mexican-origin community regardless of direct familial, friendship, or social ties with the undocumented.

I argue that in a negative societal context, Mexican-origin women face situations that call into question their sense of belonging in America. Mexican women in the U.S. are frequently assumed to speak Spanish, are still perceived as foreign, among other stereotypes. In a context that underscores their perceived differences, these women are vulnerable to experiencing microaggressions from the mainstream majority. Such experiences are contingent upon contextual impacts as well as skin color, last name, accent, and location. Relatedly, I ask the question: How do intersectional identities rooted in race, ethnicity, class, legal status, and nativity affect Mexican-origin women's incorporation processes and their mental health, as measured by symptoms of depression?

In addressing this second research question, I find that a deportation threat remains strong given the anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican climate which fans a racialization process where immigrants, regardless of legal status and nativity, are perceived and treated as undocumented immigrants. Racialization processes and its consequences provide a macro, structural, and universal explanation into the relationship between legal status and depressive symptoms. This also impacts feelings of belonging and identity among all three categories of women.

First, I find that the immigrant population both documented and undocumented identify as Mexican immigrant women strongly. Yet they experience "belonging" in different ways. Undocumented women are very aware of their status and the

exclusionary barriers they face in the United States, yet they feel a sense of belonging when they see the opportunities their children have compared to what they themselves experienced in Mexico. This new form of belonging allows these women to endure all inequalities for the betterment of their children and makes their hardships a bit more bearable. It is through the successes of their children that they enjoy a sense of belonging in the United States.

Second, while the documented women feel a bit secure given that they have papers and can travel to and from Mexico, they at times feel excluded because of language barriers and cultural values. This varies across other factors like education, English language knowledge, social support in the United States, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood characteristics.

Third, the Mexican American women experience identity and belonging in three ways. They described themselves as: 1) Mexican *Mexican* or “real” Mexican; 2) Mexican and American or being proud of both identities; and 3) “I’m American.” Those that defined themselves as Mexican *Mexican* identify closely with the immigrant experience. For most of these women it is about speaking Spanish, engaging in Mexican popular culture (e.g. listening and dancing to *banda*, *norteño*, *ranchera* music, watching *telenovelas*, etc.), dating Mexican immigrants, eating Mexican food, and engaging in other Mexican cultural activities in the U.S. The second category of women, similar to being bicultural, was equally proud of both their Mexican and American identities. The final category, “I’m American” was the category with the least amount of women that identified this way from those that participated in this study.

It is critical to note that by outlining these three categories describing Mexican identity especially today in anti-Mexican climate, I do not intend to reify notions of “Mexicaness.” Additionally, I do not intend to essentialize and homogenize their experiences. Instead I find these women’s articulations of racial authenticity as counter-narratives to the racism and anti-immigrant sentiment they face daily.

I find these women use racial authenticity as a strategy to convey and vocalize symbolic boundaries. Similarly, my aim at separating undocumented Mexican immigrant women, documented Mexican immigrant women, and U.S.-born Mexican American women is not meant to reify the concept of illegality. Instead I do this to demonstrate the complexities associated with how illegality plays out across these three groups. I highlight how their realities of illegality take a toll on their mental health by focusing on depressive symptoms associated with living in a racist and anti-immigrant society.

These findings have important implications for the immigration, race, and mental health literatures. Additionally, these findings contribute to the black-white binary of race relations by bringing to the forefront the experiences of Mexican-origin women across legal status and nativity. Moreover, these findings also have mental health implications since the first two categories can serve as protective factors to depressive symptoms.

A common theme across all groups of women interviewed was that they saw the undocumented Mexican immigrants as groups that symbolize exclusion to its fullest extent. All groups acknowledge that Mexican immigrants are targeted in political discourse, militarization of the border, draconian immigration policies, and media

depictions of Mexican immigrants. They discussed the schizophrenic nature of how undocumented Mexican immigrants are treated. For example, the immigrant labor pool is wanted, desired, and welcomed, yet these same members of society are unwelcomed, targeted, and deported at high rates.

This sends a message of disposability demonstrating how the United States continues to exclude these immigrants from obtaining a legal status. Yet even among the documented immigrant women and those born in the United States of Mexican origin, some continue to face exclusion through racist and nativist views that target Mexicans. By comparing these three groups of women across legal status and nativity, I am able to shed light on the complexities of what it means to be of Mexican-origin today. Furthermore, I argue that the pervasiveness of how Mexicans are viewed in the United States today, namely as “illegal” and criminal, have detrimental effects on the mental health of the community.

The devaluation of what it means to be Mexican today and its impacts on their identity provides a more universal way in which undocumented status can contribute to depressive symptoms among Mexican-origin women. This also includes women that do not experience threats of deportation through family, friends, or loved ones. The findings demonstrate a new form of discrimination that is not simply due to being Mexican but highly interconnected with legal status. My research pushes for scholars to move beyond the black/white binary. This research marries the immigration and mental health literatures arguing for an intersectional approach that critically highlights legal status as another marker of stratification.

The mental health literature must also examine legal status as another indicator of inequality impacting not only the immigrant population but also the U.S.-born Mexican-origin population's mental and physical health. It is critical to connect these literatures as the health literatures have shown how racism negatively impacts the health of people of color. However, racism exacerbated by an undocumented status or perceived undocumented status must also be examined. I argue future research to further interrogate how illegality and the devaluation of Mexicans impacts their identities and intra-ethnic relations. It is critical to connect how Mexican American women continue to face a pervasive deportation threat that transcends U.S.-born citizenship given the current anti-immigrant climate that devalues Mexicans.

### **Findings & Theoretical Frameworks: What Does Illegality Have To Do With It?**

This research is informed by an interdisciplinary body of literature engaging the fields of immigration, intersectionality, and mental health. Merging these large bodies of literature is necessary to better understand the experiences of Mexican-origin women living in the United States – especially in the context of today's anti-immigrant climate. This dissertation draws from the dominant approach to immigrant incorporation, namely segmented assimilation theory. It also uses an intersectionality perspective to better understand the incorporation experiences of Mexican-origin women and their mental health outcomes.

### **Segmented Assimilation Theory**

Segmented assimilation theory offers a new approach to U.S. immigrant incorporation that focuses on post-1965 immigrants of color. It posits that these new

immigrant groups experience divergent paths in incorporating to U.S. society (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Zhou 1997). This theory places emphasis on individual level (e.g. human capital, social capital) and contextual (e.g. discrimination, immigration policies, ethnic community characteristics, etc.) factors in explaining how immigrants and their children assimilate into U.S. society (Portes and Zhou 1993).

Segmented assimilation theory places an emphasis on the context of reception arguing that it shapes the structure of opportunities and intensifies the structural barriers immigrant groups encounter upon arrival (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006). Segmented assimilation theorists argue the context of reception facing immigrants upon arrival plays a vital role in their socioeconomic incorporation. For example, a negative societal reception, such as discrimination, is thought to hinder or block opportunities in the labor market (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006).

What is less well known, however, is the effect of a negative reception context on non-economic indicators, such as mental health outcomes (Horevitz and Organista 2012). Yet, empirical research demonstrating how a negative context of reception associated with nativism, racism, and unauthorized legal status, impacts the mental health outcomes of Mexican-origin women is limited. This dissertation contributes towards filling this gap.

This dissertation contributes to the segmented assimilation literature by bringing to the forefront the importance of examining illegality and its impacts on the incorporation experiences of Mexican-origin women. My findings show that undocumented legal status does not only serve as a barrier for the undocumented

Mexican immigrant women but it has broader impacts on documented and U.S.-born Mexican American women.

This research also contributes to the linkage between examining undocumented legal status and mental health. Findings from this dissertation demonstrate how the undocumented experience extends beyond the undocumented population. Finally by using an intersectionality approach, I have been able to show the importance of adding undocumented legal status to the equation of identities. My findings demonstrate undocumented legal status matters for immigration, race, and mental health literatures.

### **Intersectionality**

I use an intersectionality approach to analyze the data from a critical and structural approach. An intersectional approach decenters the emphasis on ethnic group membership (which is highly used in immigration literature) by bringing in other salient social group formations like race, and notably, legal status and nativity, to show how these distinct yet intersecting identities fuse to shape Mexican-origin women's mental health outcomes in ways that have not been considered fully in previous research. My approach brings new insights and directions to better understand the process of incorporation among disadvantaged populations. I highlight the importance on focusing on legal status as yet another form of oppression and/or privilege. Likewise, I hope to highlight the importance on showing how legal status is imbued with racial meaning to immigration scholars.

## **Mental Health and Undocumented Status**

The mental health literature must also examine legal status as another indicator of inequality impacting not only the immigrant population but also the U.S.-born Mexican-origin population's mental and physical health. Research questions should move towards critically examining how legal status impacts the health outcomes of the Mexican-origin community.

It is critical to connect these literatures as the health literatures have shown how racism negatively impacts the health of people of color. However, racism exacerbated by an undocumented status must also be examined. We must push our future research questions from focusing on solving puzzles like the Latino Health Paradox to further complicating this puzzle. This can be done by investigating how undocumented status and the devaluation of Mexicans impacts their identities and intra-ethnic relations. It is critical to connect how Mexican American women continue to face a pervasive deportation threat that transcends U.S.-born citizenship given the current anti-immigrant climate that devalues Mexicans.

Previous research on immigrant mental health has shown that immigrants enjoy lower rates and risks of psychiatric disorders, including depression, when compared against U.S.-born Mexican Americans (Finch, Kolody, and Vega 2000; Escobar, Nervi, and Gara 2000). Yet, positive findings associated with immigrant status, or what has been dubbed the "Latina/o Health Paradox," do not account for differences across legal status. Towards this end, I merge segmented assimilation theory with intersectionality theory to help me accentuate the impacts of illegality.



As a qualitative researcher vested in Latina/o mental health disparities, I move towards further investigating the complexities and nuances of the Latina/o health paradox. I highlight “unauthorized status” and other structural social locations that serve as major impediments and stressors in the lives of these women and their families. It is imperative to focus on the structural factors and ideological processes that limit the opportunities and continue to disenfranchise women of color in the United States.

### **Significance of Research**

My dissertation research advances immigrant mental health knowledge in three ways. First, my project is interdisciplinary, merging research from immigration, intersectionality, and mental health disciplines. My study works at the juncture of these disciplines to develop a new framework that underscores the role of legal status on immigrant's life chances. New insights from my research underscore the need to expand notions of assimilation or incorporation beyond economic or social indicators such as education or language proficiency to consider how structural inequality rooted in legal status affects mental health. My findings also highlight how social structural conditions such as a negative societal reception context defined by an anti-immigrant environment affect disadvantaged groups.

Second, my work decenters the traditional approach's emphasis on ethnicity. By bringing in other salient social group formations like race, and notably, legal status, I show that these distinct yet intersecting identities fuse to shape Mexican-origin women's mental health outcomes in ways that have not been considered fully in previous research. My approach outlines new areas of inquiry in the study of mental health and

immigration by highlighting structural inequalities associated with citizenship and belonging.

Third, my research underscores the role of unauthorized status as a salient social group formation that conditions Mexican origin women's mental health outcomes. The implications of this study are of the utmost importance for understanding the factors that affect depressive symptoms among Mexican-origin women, and how those factors may vary across multiple dimensions of identity. My research is novel because it pushes social scientists, health researchers, and immigrant rights advocates to consider how structural inequalities, such as how undocumented status or perceived undocumented status shapes mental health outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation aims to understand how depressive symptoms vary across intersectional identities. My work is highly motivated by De Genova's push towards examining the impacts of deportation on individuals and communities. This led me to focus on a deportation threat that transcends legal status, nativity, and generation status among the Mexican-origin community. In this study, I highlight how a racist and nativist society further exacerbates a deportation threat.

The universal and overarching factor that connects all categories of Mexican-origin women in America is the negative context of reception. In the current social context, one that can be described as racist and nativist, Mexican immigrants and even Mexican Americans confront a process of racialization and foreignness. This impacts their incorporation experiences, including their identity and sense of belonging and

exclusion, and how undocumented status directly and indirectly fosters depressive symptoms among Mexican-origin women.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Drawing on ninety face-to-face interviews with undocumented, documented, and Mexican American women, this dissertation adopts an intersectional approach to critically examine how a negative context of reception, shapes the susceptibility to depressive symptoms. It focuses on a social context that has been characterized as anti-immigrant and discriminatory (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 2006).

This dissertation also investigates the relationship between incorporation and mental health outcomes of Mexican-origin women across legal status and nativity through an intersectionality lens. Intersectionality theory serves to critically examine the “intersection” of identities, such as gender and ethnicity, which provides an avenue to view oppression and privilege as a multi-dimensional process (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; 1991; Valdez 2011; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012).

This study focuses on how the process of incorporation, or assimilation, affects a non-traditional indicator – Mexican-origin women’s mental health. More specifically, this study examines the mental health outcomes, as measured by depressive symptomatology, of Mexican-origin women across nativity and legal status. Findings across a diverse group of Mexican-origin women in Houston, Texas, shed light on how individual, group, and structural level inequalities shape depressive symptoms.

My findings reveal that in the current context of an anti-immigrant sentiment, the emergence of a deportation threat has negatively shaped Mexican-origin women’s

mental health outcomes, regardless of their legal status. A deportation threat, particularly salient and timely due to the mass “deportation regime” of the United States today (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Dreby 2014), is revealed and impacts these women in direct and indirect ways across legal status and nativity. Undocumented Mexican immigrant women experience a deportation threat directly that takes a toll on their mental health. This is due to their more vulnerable and precarious status.

Documented Mexican immigrant and Mexican American women also experience a deportation threat in indirect ways that also impacts their mental health. The critical differences between these subgroups are rooted in legal status, which puts undocumented women in an oppressive position that increases their susceptibility to depressive symptoms. However, my research suggests further that undocumented legal status has broader implications for the Mexican-origin community, in what I call *undocumented vicariousness*. It is clear that legal status serves as a safety net to protect some legal permanent residents and Mexican American women from deportation; however, the collateral consequences of deportation and illegality extend to the families, friends, and loved ones of the undocumented.

My study underscores the importance of understanding undocumented legal status as a social construction. Through a racialization process that includes a societal reception context characterized as anti-immigrant, undocumented status as it relates to Mexican-origin women’s social location and multiple identities (both self-identities and imposed-identities) contributes to depressive symptoms, regardless of their legal status and direct or indirect ties with the undocumented community.

Today's anti-immigrant sentiment sets a societal context that blurs the boundaries of illegality and belonging across legal status and nativity. The findings of this dissertation show that Mexican-origin women reveal feelings of exclusion, regardless of their legal status. Findings also show how the process of racialization conditions their self-identities and their imposed-identities across legal status and nativity, including how they label or perceive members of their own community. Through this lens, it is clear that the feelings of exclusion and belonging, discourse of racial and ethnic identification, and undocumented vicariousness among Mexican American women, suggest that their mental health reflects and is shaped by the societal context in which they live. The findings of this dissertation point towards the salience of undocumented legal status as another marker of inequality and stratification that impact the lives of the undocumented as well as the lives of the Mexican community at large.

This study contributes to the growing interest in intersectionality and in particular: the role of legal status as an additional indicator of inequality, privilege, and stratification (Abrego 2014; Menjívar 1999; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). My findings show undocumented status extends beyond the undocumented population to also impact the Mexican-origin community at large. Therefore, it is critical for research on Mexican-origin incorporation to consider how undocumented status complicates the incorporation process of the Mexican-origin community, especially as it impacts mental health outcomes.

Previous research has established the linkage between racism and perceived discrimination and mental health outcomes (Brondolo et al. 2009; Williams et al. 2003;

Williams and Mohammed 2009; Williams and Sternthal 2010). However, less is known about how undocumented legal status further complicates this relationship (Viruell-Fuentes 2007; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). My dissertation pushes immigration, mental health, and race and ethnic relations scholars to critically investigate how undocumented legal status impacts the lives of immigrants, undocumented, documented, and U.S.-born Mexican Americans ranging from second generation and beyond. It is clear from the stories of the women in this dissertation, that undocumented status as an individual category of identity or social group formation, matters for incorporation and mental health and also impacts the community widely.

By situating this study within a framework of intersectionality, my work argues for the importance of examining how and to what extent undocumented legal status – as an additional social group formation along with race, class, ethnicity, and other dimensions of identity – condition the lives of Mexican-origin women. By bringing together an analysis of multiple identities along with legal status, I show how these distinct yet intersecting identities fuse to shape Mexican-origin women's mental health outcomes in ways that have not been considered fully in previous research. My approach outlines new areas of inquiry in the study of mental health and immigration by highlighting structural inequalities associated with citizenship and belonging. Overall this study makes important theoretical and empirical contributions to the segmented assimilation, race and ethnic relations, and mental health literatures.

On a personal note, my privileged position as a Ph.D. Candidate conducting research on my own community has indeed been empowering and sometimes frustrating.

Throughout the research process, there were times I often became frustrated and angry with the injustices that continue to plague my community. As a researcher, I felt very limited and constrained. Other times I felt guilty given that the outcome of this study will result in a Ph.D. degree for me yet the lives of some of the women I study continue to be the same. It is disheartening to know that particularly those that are undocumented, continue to live in the shadows today.

Other times it was painful to hear of women that have “succeeded” yet continue to be racialized today. Yet it was empowering to learn of the counter-narratives they have built to survive in an anti-immigrant and racist society. It is critical to contextualize these women’s experiences within a white supremacist ideology and to find ways to dismantle racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. I am committed to turning my feelings of conflict, frustration, and sadness, into social policy and sociological research that may lead to positive impacts for my community.

My dissertation research has solidified my commitment towards broadening the narrowly defined process of knowledge production in academia to use methodologies that allow me to bring to the forefront these women’s voices. Additionally, this study has made a positive personal contribution in my life. I argue this indeed is one of the beauties associated with qualitative research. I close this section with a quote that resembles my approach to research. Quaye (2007) published in the *Journal of Research Practice* an article entitled: “Voice of the Researcher: Extending the Limits of What Counts as Research” states:



Educators should seek unorthodox avenues for students to explore their identities through research. When working with humans, it is almost impossible not to be influenced by their stories. The very nature of speaking with participants can lead one to question and rethink who they are. I propose that emerging scholars explore these tensions and the role of their identities in research. Storytelling is not suspect but is fundamental to research practice, even to the lives of human beings (Grobstein, 2005; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). To be heard is a privilege not equally extended to all persons. We hear our participants in research when we allow ourselves to be changed and invite the messiness that personal subjectivities entail (pg. 8).

### **Research Limitations & Future Research**

This study has several limitations. First, one of the common limitations associated with qualitative designs and more particularly, the use of snowball samples for recruitment, is the inability to generalize to a larger population. However, the methods and techniques I used to complete this study, along with the quality and richness of the data, I argue supersede these limitations.

Yet one limitation that I believe is a result of the snowball sampling technique deals with the lack of variation of backgrounds from the women that participated in this study. Since women were asked to refer me to other women that would be interested in participating, it was often that those they referred resembled their socio-economic status and educational levels. In order to address this limitation, I employed purposive sampling to aim to get a variation of experiences ranging from undocumented women that entered the U.S. clandestinely to women that overstayed visas; documented women that were once undocumented and/or documented women that entered the U.S. with “papers”; to Mexican American women from various generations to different educational experiences and SES backgrounds. This allowed me the opportunity to meet

Mexican American women that had been in and out of prison since adolescence into adulthood.

Second, I experienced some frustration in differentiating a typology of generations. The women were placed under certain generation categories to assist me in the analysis. The second generation, the descendants of immigrants, is growing given the influx of immigrants, fertility, and intermarriage complicating what “counts” as a specific generation (Rumbaut 2004). Our understanding of generation differences is methodologically, empirically, and theoretically important especially in understanding how groups incorporate into society. For example, there are differences between the 1.5 generation and the first-generation or those that have been in the United States for over four generations. I interviewed few women that are considered 1.5 generation (and its subcategories, e.g. 1.75; 1.25) and a limitation is that I did not separate out their experiences in detail.

A future study will disentangle the 1.5 generation from this study and also build on the 1.5 generation by including additional interviews with this population. Additionally, I would like to further examine and analyze the experiences of the women interviewed in this study by using generational cohorts defined by age and life stage arrival among the foreign-born and by parental nativity among the U.S. born (Rumbaut 2004). I will then compare the differences and similarities of using this generational approach to the current one I used for this study.

Another limitation, which was beyond the scope of the project, deals with examining gender. This study explores immigration and mental health from an

intersectional approach mainly focusing on the experiences of Mexican-origin women across legal status and nativity. I chose to focus on Mexican-origin women because I am building on my previous research. I build on my Masters to examine how illegality plays out across nativity and legal status and how this impacts depressive symptoms. This study adds the experiences of documented Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican American women.

Therefore, a limitation of this research can be the absence of the experiences of Mexican-origin men. Future research will also include an analysis of men so I can highlight differences across gender, legal status, nativity, and other social locations. Although this is a limitation, the overall contribution to intersectionality theory is the focus on unauthorized legal status and nativity as social locations that exacerbate other marginalized identities. The experiences of undocumented, documented, and U.S.-born Mexican American men compared to those of the women in this study will be a future study. This future study will help us understand how another social location, namely gender, impacts the incorporation experiences and mental health outcomes of the Mexican-origin population.

Previous research shows how depression affects both men and women differently (Falicov 2003). Some argue depression is gendered resulting in women being more likely diagnosed with depression than men. For example, in the United States 7 percent of women will be diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives compared to 2.6 percent of men (Denmark et al. 2000). Although most of this research is based on white-middle class women, depression is believed to affect women of all races and social

classes more than it does men (Stoppard 2000). Cochran and Rabinowitz (2000) suggest that men experience mental and emotional distress like depression but they manifest it differently. These manifestations fit social expectations placed on men.

Given the dearth of knowledge on the undocumented experience and depression, this research warrants attention. Additionally, Mexican immigrant men are the main targets of police surveillance, detention, and deportation (Dowling and Inda 2013; Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). Examining gender as another social location will build on the intersectionality framework of incorporation. Providing a gendered lens into the broader analysis of how legal status impacts the stressors associated with the undocumented experience warrants attention.

In another future study I plan to include the sociological stress process model as a framework in explaining the experiences of the women from this study. In doing this, I also hope to include the trauma literature to further explain undocumented vicariousness. Finally, my dissertation findings suggest how unauthorized status extends beyond the individual and negatively impacts families' and the Mexican-origin community more widely. Similarly, I argue these findings can be paralleled with other vulnerable groups: inmates and deportees. This leads me to a new research project tentatively titled: "The Collateral Consequences of Incarceration and Deportation: Mexican-origin Men Behind Bars and their Families' Mental Health Outcomes." This future study sits at the nexus of crime, race, punishment, immigration, and mental health.

## **Broader Implications**

These research findings are critical and timely. Given the demographic reality of Latina/os being the largest and fastest growing racial and ethnic group in the United States, it is critical to pay particular attention to the incorporation processes and struggles associated with this population. Mexicans, more specifically, are the largest group within the Latina/o pan-ethnic category. My findings show that undocumented status among Mexican immigrants does not only matter for the individual yet it has collateral consequences impacting entire communities. My work is situated at the nexus of race, immigration, and mental health research and the findings have broader implications for each of these fields.

Scholars argue about the future of race relations in the United States. Immigrants of color have complicated the traditional black/white binary of race relations (Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010). Some scholars argue that the black/white divide will continue but the category of white will expand to include non-Black Latina/o immigrants (Gans 1999; Lee and Bean 2004). Others argue Latina/os will represent a unique and new racial group, separate from blacks and whites (O'Brien 2008). Yet others argue that the U.S. will experience a tri-racial stratification system, a Latin America-like racial order, characterized by (white, honorary white, and the collective black) and a "pigmentocracy" where people will be ranked based on skin color (Bonilla-Silva 2004). Others argue that skin color discrimination constrains Latina/os racial identification (Frank et al. 2010; Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). Yet legal status also further complicates the future of race relations in the United States.

How does unauthorized legal status further complicate race and ethnic relations? Where does the undocumented population fit in the racial hierarchy? How does legal status become racialized? How do other undocumented groups fare compared to Mexican undocumented groups? For instance, are the experiences of white undocumented immigrants similar or different from those of immigrants of color? My research shows that unauthorized legal status does indeed impact the ways in which both immigrant and Mexican American women define who they are in the United States. But more research is needed to further understand the future of race relations.

The broader implications of my research also speak to the mental health literature by showing how undocumented status and illegality impacts Mexican-origin women. My findings show that undocumented status results in a susceptibility to depressive symptoms extending from the undocumented individual to their families and loved ones. These findings have implications in further understanding the Latino Health Paradox by focusing on undocumented status.

The Latino Health Paradox argues immigrants are healthier than their U.S.-born counterparts and the longer they remain in the United States, the worse their health becomes. This research is based on large quantitative datasets, therefore researchers have been limited in disaggregating between immigrants that are undocumented versus documented. My research contributes to this puzzle by arguing for the need to disaggregate across legal status. Finally my research contributes to two hotly debated topics, immigration and mental health. In doing so, this research has policy recommendations.

## **Policy Recommendations**

As a sociologist that is committed to social justice, it is my goal to conduct empirical research that will improve the lives of the communities I study. Yet I am well aware that research can be misrepresented by some to advance their arguments. For example, Alba, Kasinitz, and Waters (2011) critique Telles and Ortiz (2008). They point towards anti-immigrant, right-wing extremists, using Telles and Ortiz's findings to promote their interests. This is, of course, beyond the control of any social scientist and one must not allow these fears to deter them from presenting their findings. Telles and Ortiz (2011) respond:

no matter how we present our findings, we would have been unable to overcome commonsense notions among large segments of society that the lack of assimilation simply reflects deficiencies among the "unassimilable." Social structural barriers, like race and other negative contexts of reception, are absent from the analysis of right-wing extremists and other segments of society. It is incumbent upon us to present our findings in an honest manner with interpretations that fit the evidence. And we are not responsible when our findings are interpreted within a folk ideology of assimilation that blames individuals for not overcoming structural limitations (p. 509).

Unfortunately this is a reality that researchers deal with however; I concur with Telles and Ortiz wholeheartedly. This fear should not paralyze anyone from presenting their findings. My dissertation findings can be misconstrued by some but this will not stop me from making policy recommendations.

The findings my dissertation makes lend themselves towards immigration and mental health policy recommendations. Both immigration and mental health are highly contested topics. Historically mental health illness and race have been used to exclude so called "undesirables" from entering the United States. Unfortunately the stigma

associated with mental illness prevails today. For example, some women in this study discussed their lack of seeking mental health care associating it with the fear of being labeled as not demonstrating “good moral character” a prerequisite for obtaining legal residency in the United States. Many of the undocumented immigrant women attributed their undocumented status as a major barrier in obtaining mental health care. This supports the argument that immigration and health policies should be discussed simultaneously, especially given the impacts undocumented status has on health outcomes.

Both undocumented legal status and a mental health illness such as depression have stigmas attached to these labels. My research finds that the undocumented women of this study are indeed the most vulnerable and susceptible to exhibiting depressive symptoms. It also shows the collateral consequences of undocumented status on the rest of the community. I argue that it is imperative to pass comprehensive immigration reform with a path to legalization.

The future of the United States depends on the largest and fastest growing racial and ethnic minority and therefore this makes it even more urgent. Put simply, immigration is not only an issue that immigrants, their children, families, or loved ones, should be concerned about; but all should be concerned since the future of the United States will be shaped by today’s immigrants. Additionally, my research suggests a need for mental health interventions that take into account the experiences of the undocumented population. It also argues for a human rights approach to both



immigration and health care. The Affordable Care Act continues to exclude the undocumented population and some documented immigrants.

I conclude with a quote by Jazmin, 28 years old, born in Guanajuato and entered the United States at the young age of 2 years old. She grew up as an undocumented immigrant but today is a naturalized U.S. citizen. She states:

*“[What depresses me] is knowing how hard I’ve worked... It’s like the thought has crossed my mind that okay I really want my Ph.D. but what is that really gonna change? Am I just going to add to the small percentage of Hispanic women who have a Ph.D.? It doesn’t change that I am discriminated.”*

I bring attention to this quote and as my research shows, undocumented, documented, and Mexican American women continue to face microaggressions, discrimination, and racism, regardless of obtaining legal status, acquiring higher education, perfecting their English, and/or even changing one’s physical appearance or way of dressing. Jazmin explains her depression stemming from working hard but still feeling excluded in some spaces. This shows the taxation racism has on the lives of people of color. Although I argue for the passage of immigration reform with a legalization path for all undocumented immigrants, I also argue legalization is not enough.

The anti-immigrant discourse and rhetoric promoting negative images of what it means to be Mexican in the United States, particularly the synonymous identities of Mexican equating “illegal” must be eradicated. Thus, like education is not the great equalizer given that highly educated people of color continue to confront racism, I argue that legalizing immigrants without dismantling the dominant discourse on undocumented Mexicans and without providing ways for them to feel a sense of belonging, a path to

citizenship will not be the great equalizer. Therefore, I argue for a path to legalization with resources for integrating into U.S. society but we must also find ways to dismantle anti-immigrant sentiment, nativism, and racism at an individual and structural level.

## REFERENCES

- Abrego, Leisy. 2011. "Legal Consciousness of Undocumented Latinos: Fear and Stigma as Barriers to Claims-Making for First- and 1.5-Generation Immigrants." *Law & Society Review* 45(2):337-69.
- , 2014. *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Abrego, Leisy J. and Roberto G. Gonzales. 2010. "Blocked Paths, Uncertain Futures: The Postsecondary Education and Labor Market Prospects of Undocumented Youth." *Journal of Education for Students Placed Risk* 15(1):144-57.
- Acevado-Garcia, Dolores, Mah J. Soobader, and Lisa F. Berkman. 2007. "Low Birthweight among U.S. Hispanic/Latino Subgroups: The Effect of Maternal Foreign-born Status and Education." *Social Science & Medicine* 65(12):2503-16.
- Acevado-Garcia, Dolores and Lisa M. Bates. 2008. "Latino Health Paradoxes: Empirical Evidence, Explanations, Future Research, and Implications." Pp. 101-126 in *Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of America*, edited by H. Rodriguez, R. Saenz, C. Menjivar. New York, NY: Springer.
- Ackerman, Edwin. 2012. "'What Part of Illegal Don't You Understand?' Bureaucracy and Civil Society in the Shaping of Illegality." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(2):181-203.
- Agius Vallejo, Jody. 2012. *Barrios to Burbs: The Making of the Mexican American Middle Class*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Alba, Richard and Victor Nee. 2003. *Rethinking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Alba, Richard, Philip Kasinitz, and Mary C. Waters. 2011. "The Kids Are (Mostly) Alright: Second-Generation Assimilation: Comments on Haller, Portes, and Lynch." *Social Forces* 89(3):763-73.
- Alegria, Margarita, Norah Mulvaney-Day, Maria Torres, Antonio Polo, Zhun Cao, and Glorisa Canino. 2007. "Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders across Latino Subgroups." *American Journal of Public Health* 97(1):68-75.

- Alegria, Margarita, Gloriso Canino, Patrick E. Shrout, Meghan Woo, Naihua Duan, Doryliz Vila, Maria Torres, Chih-nan Chen, and Xiao-Li Meng. 2008. "Prevalence of Mental Illness in Immigrant and Non-immigrant US Latino groups." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 165(3):359-69.
- Almaguer, Tomás. 1994. *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- American Psychological Association. 2012. *Crossroads: The Psychology of Immigration in the New Century: Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration*. APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved April 20, 2014, from <http://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/immigration-report.pdf>
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Publisher.
- Aranda, María P. and Manuel R. Miranda. 1997. "Hispanic Aging, Social Support, and Mental Health: Does Acculturation Make a Difference?" Pp. 271-294 in *Minorities, Aging and Health*, edited by K. S. Markides and M. R. Miranda. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Baca-Zinn, Maxine. 1979. "Field Research in Minority Communities: Ethical, Methodological and Political Observations by an Insider." *Social Problems* 27(2):209-19.
- Barcenas, Carlos H. Anna V. Wilkinson, Sara S. Strom, Yumei Cao, Katherine C. Saunders, Somdat Mahabir, María A. Hernández-Valero, Michele R. Forman, Margaret R. Spitz and Melissa L. Bondy. 2007. "Birthplace, Years of Residence in the United States, and Obesity among Mexican American Adults." *Obesity* 15:1043-52.
- Bell, Derrick. 1992. *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. Basic Books.
- Berk, Mark L. and Claudia L. Schur. 2001. "The Effect of Fear on Access to Care Among Undocumented Latino Immigrants." *Journal of Immigrant Health* 3(3):151-56.
- Berry, John W. 1980. "Acculturation as Varieties of Adaptation." Pp. 9-25 in *Acculturation: Theory, Models and Some New Findings*, edited by A. Padilla. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Blauner, Robert. 1972. *Racial Oppression in America*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Blauner, Bob and David Wellman. 2001. "Toward the Decolonization of Social Research." Pp. 173-185 in *Still the Big News: Racial Oppression in America*, B. Blauner. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 1997. "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation." *American Sociological Review* 62:465-80.
- , 2003. "New Racism, Color-Blind Racism, and the Future of Whiteness in America." Pp. 271-84 in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, edited by: A. W. Doane and E. Bonilla-Silva. New York, NY: Routledge.
- , 2004. "From Bi-Racial to Tri-Racial: Towards a New System of Racial Stratification in the USA." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(6):931-50.
- , 2010. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Burnett, John. 2014. "U.S. Border Patrol's Response to Violence in Question." National Public Radio, May 15. Retrieved June 5, 2014 (<http://www.npr.org/2014/05/15/312573512/u-s-border-patrols-response-to-violence-in-question>).
- Brondolo, Elizabeth, Linda C. Gallo, and Hector F. Myers. 2009. "Race, Racism and Health: Disparities, Mechanisms, and Interventions." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 32:1-8.
- Brown, Diane R. and Verna Keith. 2003. *In and Out of Our Right Minds: The Mental Health of African American Women*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Brown, Tony N. 2003. "Critical Race Theory Speaks to the Sociology of Mental Health: Mental Health Problems Produced by Racial Stratification." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 44: 292-301.
- , 2008. "Race, Racism, and Mental Health: Elaboration of Critical Race Theory's Contribution to the Sociology of Mental Health." *Contemporary Justice Review* 13:53-62.
- Brown, Tony N., Katharine M. Donato, Mary T. Laske, and Ebony M. Duncan. 2013. "Race, Nativity, Ethnicity, and Cultural Influences in the Sociology of Mental Health." in Pp. 255-276 the *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, edited by C. S. Aneshensel, J. C. Phelan, A. Bierman. New York, NY: Springer.
- Browne, Irene, and Joya Misra. 2003. "The Intersection of Gender and Race in Labor Markets." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:487-513.

- Burawoy, Michael, Alice Burton, Ann Arnett Ferguson, Kathryn J. Fox, Joshua Gamson, Nadine Gartrell, Leslie Hurst, Charles Kurzman, Leslie Salzinger, Josepha Schiffman, and Shiori Ui. 1991. *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in a Modern Metropolis*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory* 16(1):4-33.
- Bürkner, Hans-Joachim. 2012. "Intersectionality: How Gender Studies Might Inspire the Analysis of Social Inequality among Migrants." *Population, Space and Place* 18:181-95.
- Caplan-Bricker, Nora. 2014. "Who's The Real Deportee-In-Chief: Bush or Obama?." *New Republic*, April 17. Retrieved April 20, 2014 (<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117412/deportations-under-obama-vs-bush-who-deported-more-immigrants>).
- Capps, Randy and Karina Fortuny. 2006. *Immigration and Child and Family Policy*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Carter, James H. 1994. "Racism's Impact on Mental Health." *Journal of the National Medical Association* 86(7):543-47.
- Castro, Felipe, Flavio F. Gonzalez, Stephen Kulis Marsiglia, and Joshua G. Kellison. 2010. "Lifetime Segmented Assimilation Trajectories and Health Outcomes in Latino and Other Community Residents." *American Journal of Public Health* 100(4):669-76.
- Chavez, Leo. 2013. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cho, Sumi, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. 2013. "Toward A Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs* 38(4):785-810.
- Cochran, Sam V. and Fredric E. Rabinowitz. 2000. *Men and Depression: Clinical and Empirical Approaches*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Cole, Stephen. 2001. *What's Wrong With Sociology?* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Collins, Patricia H. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

- Cook, Benjamin, Margarita Alegria, Julia Y. Lin, and Jing Guo. 2009. "Pathways and Correlates Connecting Latinos' Mental Health with Exposure to the United States." *American Journal of Public Health* 99(12):2247-54.
- Cornell, Stephen E. and Douglas Hartmann. 2007. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Coutin, Susan B. 2003. *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *U. Chi. Legal F.* 139-168.
- , 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6):1241-99.
- De Genova, Nicholas. 2002. "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:419-47.
- , 2004. "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality'." *Latino Studies* 2(2):160-85.
- , 2005. *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- , 2014. "Deportation." Pp. 19-20 in *Migration: A COMPAS Anthology*, edited by B. Anderson and M. Keith.
- De Genova, Nicholas and Nathalie Peutz. 2010. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. 2001. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Denmark, Florence, Vita Rabinowitz, and Jeri Sechzer. 2000. *Engendering Psychology: Bringing Women into Focus*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Denzin, Norman K. 1978. *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- , 2010. *The Qualitative Manifesto: A Call to Arms*. Left Coast Press.

- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2003. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Donato, Katharine M. and Amada Armenta. 2011. "What We Know About Unauthorized Migration." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37:529-43.
- Dowling, Julie A. and Jonathan Xavier Inda. 2013. *Governing Immigration through Crime: A Reader*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dreby, Joanna. 2012. "The Burden of Deportation on Children in Mexican Immigrant Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74(4):829-45.
- , 2014. "The Modern Deportation Regime and Mexican Families: The Indirect Consequences for Children in New Destination Communities." Pp. 181-202 in *Constructing Immigrant "Illegality": Critiques, Experiences, and Responses*, edited by C. Menjivar and D. Kanstroom. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Escobar, Javier I. 1998. "Immigration and Mental Health: Why are Immigrants Better Off?" *Archives of General Psychiatry* 55:781-82.
- Escobar, Javier I. and William A. Vega. 2000. "Mental Health and Immigration's AAAs: Where are We and Where do We Go From Here?" *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 188(11):736-40.
- Escobar, Javier I., Constanza H. Nervi, and Michael A. Gara. 2000. "Immigration and Mental Health: Mexican Americans in the United States." *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 8(2): 64-72.
- Falicov, Celia J. 2003. "Culture, Society and Gender in Depression." *Journal of Family Therapy* 25:371-87.
- Feagin, Joe R. 1988. *Free Enterprise City: Houston in Political-economic Perspective*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- , 1997. "Old Poison in New Bottles: The Deep Roots of Modern Nativism." Pp. 13-43 in *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti- Immigrant Impulse in the United States*, edited by J. F. Perea. New York: New York University Press.
- , Joe R. 2000. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge.
- , Joe R. 2006. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. New York: Routledge.



- Feagin, Joe R. and José A. Cobas. 2008. "Latinos/as and White Racial Frame: The Procrustean Bed of Assimilation." *Sociological Inquiry* 78(1):39-53.
- Fetterman, David M. 1998. *Ethnography: Step by Step*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fix, Michael E. and Wendy Zimmermann. 2001. "All Under One Roof: Mixed-Status Families in an Era of Reform." *International Migration Review* 35(2):397-419.
- Finch, Brian K., Bohdan Kolody, and William A. Vega. 2000. "Perceived Discrimination and Depression among Mexican-origin Adults in California." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41(3):295-313.
- Flores-Yeffal, Nadia Y. 2013. *Migration-Trust Networks: Social Cohesion in Mexican US-Bound Emigration*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.
- Fortuny, Karina, Randolph Capps, Margaret Simms, and Ajay Chaudry. 2009. "Children of Immigrants: National and State Characteristics." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved February 20, 2014 (<http://www.urban.org/publications/411939.html>).
- Frank, Reanne, Ilana Redstone Akresh, and Bo Lu. 2010. "Latino Immigrants and the US Racial Order: How and Where do We Fit In?" *American Sociological Review* 75(3):378-401.
- Galindo, René and Jami Vigil. 2006. "Are Anti-Immigrant Statements Racist or Nativist? What Difference Does it Make?" *Latino Studies* 4(4):419-47.
- Gallagher, Charles A. 2000. "White Like Me? Methods, Meaning, and Manipulation in the Field of White Studies." Pp. 67-92 in *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies*, edited by F. W. Twine, J. W. Warren. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1999. "The Possibility of a New Racial Hierarchy in the Twenty-first Century United States." Pp. 371-390 in *The Cultural Territories of Race*, edited by M. Lamont. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1999. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gleeson, Shannon and Roberto Gonzalez. 2012. "When do Papers Matter? An Institutional Analysis of Undocumented Life in the United States." *International Migration* 50(4):1-19.

- Gleeson, Shannon. 2012. *Conflicting Commitments: The politics of Enforcing Immigrant Worker Rights in San Jose and Houston*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Golash-Boza, Tanya M. 2012. *Immigration Nation: Raids, Detentions, and Deportations in Post-9/11 America*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Golash-Boza, Tanya and William Darity Jr. 2008. "Latino Racial Choices: The Effects of Skin Colour and Discrimination on Latinos' and Latinas' Racial Self-Identifications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31(5):899-934.
- , 2014. "From Legal to "Illegal": The Deportation of Legal Permanent Residents from the United States." Pp. 203-222 in *Constructing Immigrant "Illegality": Critiques, Experiences, and Responses*, edited by C. Menjívar and D. Kanstroom. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Golash-Boza, Tanya and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2013. "Latino Immigrant Men and the Deportation Crisis: A Gendered Racial Removal Program." *Latino Studies* 1(3):271-92.
- Golding, Jacqueline M., Marvin Karno, and Carolyn M. Rutter. 1990. "Symptoms of Major Depression among Mexican-Americans and non-Hispanic Whites." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 147(7):861-66.
- Gonzalez, Roberto G. 2011. "Learning to be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and Shifting Legal Contexts in the Transition to Adulthood." *American Sociological Review* 76:602-19.
- Gonzalez, Roberto G., Luisa Laura Heredia, and Genevieve Negrón-Gonzalez. 2014. "Challenging the Transition to New Illegalities: Undocumented Young Adults and the Shifting Boundaries of Inclusion." Pp. 161-180 in *Constructing Immigrant "Illegality": Critiques, Experiences, and Responses*, edited by C. Menjívar and D. Kanstroom. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Grobstein, Paul. 2005. "Revisiting Science in Culture: Science as Story Telling and Story Revising." *Journal of Research Practice* 1(1):1-18.
- Hagan, Jacqueline M. 1998. "Social Networks, Gender, and Immigrant Incorporation: Resources and Constraints." *American Sociological Review* 63(1):55-67.
- Haney López, Ian. 2006. *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

- Harding, Sandra G. 2004. *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.
- Heflin, Colleen, John Sandberg, and Patrick Rafail. 2009. "The Structure of Material Hardship in US Households: An Examination of the Coherence behind Common Measures of Well-Being" *Social Problems*. 56(4):746-764.
- Higham, John. 1955. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Hirschman, Charles. 2001. "The Educational Enrollment of Immigrant Youth: A Test of the Segmented-Assimilation Hypothesis." *Demography* 38(3):317-36.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 1994. *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- , 2001. *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Horevitz, Elizabeth and Kurt C. Organista. 2012. "The Mexican Health Paradox: Expanding the Explanatory Power of the Acculturation Construct." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 35(1):3-34.
- Huber, Lindsay Pérez, Corina L. Benavides, Maria C. Malagon, Veronica Velez, and Daniel G. Solórzano. 2008. "Getting Beyond the Symptom 'Acknowledging the Disease': Theorizing Racist Nativism." *Contemporary Justice Review* 11(1):39-51.
- Huisman, Kimberly. 2008. "Does This Mean You're Not Going to Come Visit Me Anymore?": An Inquiry into an Ethics of Reciprocity and Positionality in Feminist Ethnographic Research." *Sociological Inquiry* 78(3):372-96.
- Human Rights Watch. 2009. "Forced Apart (By the Numbers): Non-Citizens Deported Mostly for Nonviolent Offenses." Retrieved May 25, 2014 <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0409web.pdf>.
- Hummer, Robert A., Daniela A. Powers, Starling G. Pullum, Ginger L. Glossman, and W. Parker Frisbie. 2007. "Paradox Found (Again): Infant Mortality Among The Mexican-Origin Population in the United States." *Demography* 44(3):441-57.
- Hunt, Linda. M., Suzanne Schneider, and Brendon Comer. 2004. "Should 'Acculturation' be a Variable in Health Research?: A Critical Review of Research on US Hispanics." *Social Science & Medicine* 59:973- 86.

- Huntington, Samuel P. 2004. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Jasso, Guillermina, Douglas S. Massey, Mark R. Rosenzweig, and James P. Smith. 2004. "Immigrant Health—Selectivity and Acculturation." Pp. 227-268 in *Critical Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Differences in Health in Late Life*, edited by N.B. Anderson, R.A. Bulatao, and B. Cohen. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Jiménez, Tomas. 2010. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Jiménez, Tomás R. and David Fitzgerald. 2007. "Mexican Assimilation." *Du Bois Review: Social Science and Research on Race* 4(2):337-54.
- Johnson, Kevin R. 1995. "Public Benefits and Immigration: The Intersection of Immigration Status, Ethnicity, Gender, and Class." *UCLA Law Review* 1509(42):1-62.
- 1997. "The New Nativism: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue." Pp. 165-189 in *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States*, edited by J. F. Perea. New York: New York University Press.
- 1998. "Immigration and Latino Identity." *Chicano-Latino Law Review* 19:1-12.
- 1999. *How Did You Get to Be Mexican? A White/Brown Man's Search for Identity*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- 2004. "Public Benefits and Immigration: The Intersectionality of Immigration Status, Ethnicity, Gender and Class." *UCLA Law Review* 1-62.
- Joseph, Tiffany D. 2011. "My Life was Filled with Constant Anxiety": Anti-Immigrant Discrimination, Undocumented Status, and Their Mental Health Implications." *Race Social Problems* 3:170-81.
- Kanstroom, Daniel. 2000. "Deportation, Social Control, and Punishment: Some Thoughts about Why Hard Laws Make Bad Cases." *Harvard Law Review* 113:1890-1935.
- 2007. "Post Deportation Human Rights Law: Aspiration, Oxymoron or Necessity?" *Stanford Journal of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties* 3(2):154-232.

- , 2012. *Aftermath: Deportation Law and the New American Diaspora*. Oxford University Press.
- Kimbro, Rachel T., Bridget K. Gorman, and Ariela Schachter. 2012. "Acculturation and Self-Rated Health Among Latino and Asian Immigrants to the United States." *Social Problems* 59(3):341-63.
- Kleinman, Sherryl and Martha A. Copp. 1993. *Emotions and Fieldwork*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kroenke, Kurt, Robert L. Spitzer, and Janet BW Williams. 2001. "The PHQ-9." *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 16(9):606-13.
- Krogstad, Jens M. and Michael Keegan. 2014. "From Germany to Mexico: How America's Source of Immigrants has Changed Over a Century." *Pew Research Center*, Washington, DC.
- Kubal, Agnieszka. 2013. "Conceptualizing Semi-Legality in Migration Research." *Law & Society Review* 47(3):555-87.
- Kullgren, Jeffrey T. 2003. "Restrictions on Undocumented Immigrants' Access to Health Services: The Public Health Implications of Welfare Reform." *American Journal of Public Health* 93(10):1630-33.
- Lather, Patti. 1986. "Research as Praxis." *Harvard Educational Review* 56(3):257-78.
- Lee, Jennifer and Frank D. Bean. 2004. "America's Changing Color Lines: Immigration, Race/Ethnicity, and Multiracial Identification." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:221-42.
- Lincoln, Yvonne S. 1995. "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 3:275-89.
- Lind, Dara. 2014. "Obama is Deporting More Immigrants than Any Other President in History: Explained." *Vox*, September 13. Retrieved April 20, 2014 <http://www.vox.com/2014/4/9/5575006/2-million-immigrants-have-been-deported-under-obama>).
- Link, Bruce G. and Jo Phelan. 1995. "Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35:80-94.
- Lopez-Class, Maria, Felipe Gonzalez Castro, and Amelie G. Ramirez 2011. "Conceptions of Acculturation: A Review and Statement of Critical Issues." *Social Science & Medicine* 72(9):1555-62.

- Lopez, Mark Hugo and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. 2013. "Inside the 2012 Latino Electorate." The Pew Hispanic Research Center, June 3. Retrieved April 25, 2014 (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/06/03/inside-the-2012-latino-electorate/>).
- Lovato, Roberto. 2008. "Juan Crow in Georgia." The Nation, May 8. Retrieved May 20, 2014 (<http://www.thenation.com/article/juan-crow-georgia>).
- Madison, Soyini D. 2005. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Magaña, Cristina G. and Joseph D. Hovey. 2003. "Psychosocial Stressors Associated with Mexican Migrant Farmworkers in the Midwest United States." *Journal of Immigrant Health* 5(2):75-86.
- Maiter, Sarah, Laura Simich, and Julie Wise. 2008. "Reciprocity An Ethic for Community-based Participatory Action Research." *Action Research* 6(3):305-25.
- Markides, Kyriakos S. and Jeannine Coreil. 1986. "The Health of Hispanics in the Southwestern United States: An Epidemiologic Paradox." *Public Health Reports* 101(3):253-65.
- Markides Kyriakos S. and Karl Eschbach. 2005. "Aging, Migration, and Mortality: Current Status of Research on the Hispanic Paradox." *J Gerontol B Psychol Sci* 60(2):68–75.
- Marmot, Michael. 2004. *Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity*. Henry Holt & Company, Incorporated.
- Martinez, George A. 1999. "Latinos, Assimilation and the Law: A Philosophical Perspective." *21 Chicano-Latino L. Rev.*
- Martínez, Daniel E., Guillermo Cantor, and Walter Ewing. 2014. "No Action Taken: Lack of CBP Accountability in Responding to Complaints of Abuse." American Immigration Council's Immigration Policy Center. Reports, May.
- Martinez Pincay, Igda E. and Peter J. Guarnaccia. 2007. "It's Like Going through and Earthquake": Anthropological Perspectives on Depression among Latino Immigrants." *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health* 9:17-28.
- Massey, Douglas S. 2007. *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone. 2002. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Magaly R. Sánchez. 2010. *Brokered Boundaries: Creating Immigrant Identity in Anti-Immigrant Times*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Maxwell, Joseph A. 2005. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30(3):1771-1800.
- McKanders, Karla Mari. 2010. "Sustaining Tiered Personhood: Jim Crow and Anti-Immigrant Laws." *Harvard Journal on Racial and Ethnic Justice*. 26:777-824.
- Menjívar, Cecilia. 1999. "The Intersection of Work and Gender." *American Behavioral Scientist* 42(4):601-27.
- , 2006. "Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants' Lives in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(4):999-1037.
- Menjívar, Cecilia and Daniel Kanstroom. 2014. *Constructing Immigrant "Illegality": Critiques, Experiences, and Responses*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam, Sharan B. 2009. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Moreno, Paul. 1995. "Racial Classifications and Reconstruction Legislation." *The Journal of Southern History* 61(2):271-304.
- Ngai, Mae N. 2004. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- O'Brien, Eileen. 2008. *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Olivas, Michael A. 2005. "The Story of Plyler v. Doe: The Education of Undocumented Children, and the Polity." *Immigration Stories* 197-220.

- Oliver, Sarah J., and Brenda R. Toner. 1990. "The Influence of Gender Role Typing in the Expression of Depressive Symptoms." *Sex Roles* 22:775-90.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States. From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Palloni, Alberto and Elizabeth Arias. 2004. "Paradox Lost: Explaining the Hispanic Adult Mortality Advantage." *Demography* 41(3):385-415.
- Palloni, Alberto and Jeffrey D. Morenoff. 2001. "Interpreting the Paradoxical in the Hispanic Paradox: Demographic and the Epidemiologic Approaches." *Annals of the New York Academy Sciences* 959:140-74.
- Parker, Laurence and Marvin Lynn. 2002. "What's Race Got to Do With It? Critical Race Theory's Conflicts With and Connections to Qualitative Research Methodology and Epistemology." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8(1):7-22.
- Passel Jeffrey S. and D'Vera Cohn. 2010. "U.S. Unauthorized Immigration Flows are Down Sharply Since Mid-Decade." *Pew Hispanic Center*, Washington, DC.
- , 2012. "Unauthorized Immigrants: 11.1 million in 2011." *Pew Hispanic Center*, Washington DC.
- Passel, Jeffrey S. and D'Vera Cohn, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. 2012. "Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero--and Perhaps Less." *Pew Research Center*, Washington, DC.
- Pearlin, Leonard I., Elizabeth G. Menaghan, Morton A. Lieberman, and Joseph T. Mullan. 1981. "The Stress Process." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 22(4):337-56.
- Pearlin, Leonard I. 1989. "The Sociological Study of Stress." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 30(3):241-56.
- Perea, Juan F. 1997. *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Pérez Debra J, Lisa Fortuna, and Margarita Alegría. 2008. "Prevalence and Correlates of Everyday Discrimination among US Latinos." *Journal of Community Psychology* 36(4):421-33.
- Peutz, Nathalie. 2006. "Embarking on an Anthropology of Removal." *Current Anthropology* 47(2):217-241.



- Pierce, Chester M. 1995. "Stress Analogs of Racism and Sexism: Terrorism, Torture, and Disaster." Pp. 277-293 in *Mental Health, Racism, and Sexism*, edited by C. V. Willie, P. P. Riker, B. M. Kramer, & B. S. Brown. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Portes, Alejandro. 1998. "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review Sociology* 24:1-24.
- Portes, Alejandro and Robert L. Bach. 1985. *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Portes, Alejandro and Min Zhou. 1993. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530:74-96.
- Portes, Alejandro and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- , 2006. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Qian, Zhenchao and Daniel T. Lichter. 2007. "Social Boundaries and Marital Assimilation: Interpreting Trends in Racial and Ethnic Intermarriage." *American Sociological Review* 72:68-94.
- Quaye, Stephen John 2007. "Voice of the Researcher: Extending the Limits of What Counts as Research." *Journal of Research Practice* 3(1):Article-M3.
- Radloff, Lenore S. 1977. "The CES-D scale: A Self-Report Dimension for Research the General Population." *Applied Psychological Measurement* 1:385-401.
- Rios, Victor M. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Rodriguez, Nestor. 1993. "Economic Restructuring and Latino Growth in Houston." Pp. 101-128 in *In the Barrios: Latinos and the Underclass Debate*, edited by J. Moore and R. Pinderhughes. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- , 1999. "U.S. Immigration and Changing Relations between African Americans and Latinos." Pp. 423-32 in *The Handbook of International Migration: the American Experience*, edited by C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz, J. DeWind. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Rogler, Lloyd H., Douglas T. Gurak, and Rosemary Santana-Cooney. 1987. "The Migration Experience and Mental Health: Formulations Relevant to Hispanics and Other Immigrants." Pp. 72-84 in *Health and Behavior: Research Agenda for Hispanics*, edited by M. Gaviria, J. D. Arana.
- Rogler, Lloyd H., Dharma E. Cortes, and Robert G. Malgady. 1991. "Acculturation and Mental Health Status Among Hispanics: Convergence and New Directions for Research." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 46(6):585-597.
- Romero, Mary. 2008a. "Crossing the Immigration and Race Border: A Critical Race Theory Approach to Immigration Studies." *Contemporary Justice Review* 11(1): 23-37.
- , 2008b. "The Inclusion of Citizenship Status in Intersectionality: What Immigration Raids Tells Us About Mixed-status Families, the State and Assimilation." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 34(2):131-52.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. 1994. "The Crucible Within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation among Children of Immigrants." *International Migration Review* 28(4):748-94.
- , 2004. "Ages, Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Second Generations in the United States." *International Migration Review* 38(3):1160-1205.
- Sáenz, Rogelio. 2004. *Latinos and the Changing Face of America*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Sáenz, Rogelio, Cecilia Menjivar, and San Juanita García 2011. "Arizona's SB 1070: Setting Conditions for Violations of Human Rights Here and Beyond." Pp. 155-178 in *Sociology of Human Rights: A Bill of Rights for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by J. Blau, & Frezzo, M. Pine Forge Press.
- Sáenz, Rogelio and Trinidad Morales. 2012. "The Latino Paradox." Pp. 47-73 in *The Demography of the Hispanic Population: Selected Essays*, edited by R. R. Verdugo. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publications, Inc.
- Salcido, Olivia and Cecilia Menjivar. 2012. "Gendered Paths to Legal Citizenship: The Case of Latin-American Immigrants in Phoenix, Arizona." *Law & Society Review* 46(2):335-68.
- Salgado de Snyder, V. Nelly. 1987. "Factors Associated with Acculturative Stress and Depressive Symptomatology among married Mexican immigrant women." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 11:475-88.

- Sanders, Jimmy M. 2002. "Ethnic Boundaries and Identity in Plural Societies." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:327-57.
- Schulz, Amy J. and Leith Mullings. 2006. *Gender, Race, Class, and Health: Intersectional Approaches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shrout, Patrick E., Glorisa J. Canino, Hector R. Bird, Maritza Rubio-Stipec, Milagros Bravo, and M. Audrey Burnam. 1992. "Mental Health Status among Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, and Non-Hispanic Whites." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 20(6):729-52.
- Singer, Eleanor, John V. Hoewyk, Nancy Gebler, Trivellore Raghunathan, and Katherine McGonagle. 1999. "The Effect of Incentives on Response Rates in Interviewer-Mediated Surveys." *Journal of Official Statistics* 15(2):217-30.
- Smith, William, Walter R. Allen, and Lynette L. Danley. 2007. "Assume the Position... You Fit the Description: Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue Among African American Male College Students." *American Behavioral Scientist* 51(4):551-78.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. University of Toronto Press.
- Solórzano, Daniel G. and Tara J. Yosso. 2001. "Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-storytelling." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14(4):471-95.
- Stiles, Andrew. 2014. "Obama Administration Inflating Deportation Numbers," *National Review Online*, February 10. Retrieved April 20, 2014 (<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/370784/obama-administration-inflating-deportation-numbers-andrew-stiles>).
- Stoppard, Janet M. 2000. *Understanding Depression: Feminist Social Constructionist Approaches*. London: Routledge.
- Strauss, Anselm, Juliet M. Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Technique*. Sage: Newbury Park, London.
- Sullivan, Margaret M. and Roberta Rehm. 2005. "Mental Health of Unauthorized Mexican Immigrants: A Review of the Literature." *Advances in Nursing Science* 28(3):240-51.

- Talavera, Victor, Guillermina Gina Núñez, and Josiah Heyman. 2010. "Deportation in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Anticipation, Experience, and Memory." Pp. 166-195 in *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*, edited by N. De Gonova and N. Peutz. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Telles, Edward E. and Edward Murguía. 1990. "Phenotypic Discrimination and Income Differences Among Mexican Americans." *Social Science Quarterly* 71:682-96.
- Telles, Edward E. and Vilma Ortiz. 2008. *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- , 2011. "Racialization and Mexican American Incorporation: A Reply to Lawrence Bobo and José Itzigsohn." *Du Bois Review* 8(2):506-10.
- Torres, Jacqueline M. and Steven P. Wallace. 2013. "Migration Circumstances, Psychological Distress, and Self-rated Physical Health for Latino Immigrants in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health* 103(9):1619-27.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2013. "International Migration Report" Retrieved January 10, 2014 ([http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full\\_Document\\_final.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full_Document_final.pdf)).
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2012. American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates. Retrieved January 10, 2014 (<http://factfinder2.census.gov>).
- Valdez, Zulema. 2011. *The New Entrepreneurs: How Race, Class, and Gender Shape American Enterprise*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Valdez, Zulema. 2006. "Segmented Assimilation Among Mexicans in the Southwest." *The Sociological Quarterly* 47(3):397-424.
- Valenzuela Jr, Abel. 2003. "Day Labor work." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:307-33.
- Vasquez, Jessica. 2011. *Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Vega, William A., Bohdan Kolody, and Juan R. Valle. 1987. "Migration and Mental Health: An Empirical Test of Depression Risk Factors among Immigrant Mexican Women." *International Migration Review* 21(3):512-30.
- Vega, William A. and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 1991. "Ethnic Minorities and Mental Health." *Annual Review Sociology* 17:351-83.

- Vega, William A. Bohdan Kolody, Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, Ethel Alderete, Ralph Catalano, and Jorge Caraveo-Anduaga. 1998. "Lifetime Prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders Among Urban and Rural Mexican Americans in California." *Archives of General Psychiatry* 55: 771-78.
- Viruell-Fuentes, Edna A. 2007. "Beyond Acculturation: Immigration, Discrimination, and Health Research among Mexicans in the United States." *Social Science & Medicine* 65: 1524-35.
- Viruell-Fuentes, Edna A. and Amy J. Schulz. 2009. "Toward a Dynamic Conceptualization of Social Ties and Context: Implications for Understanding Immigrant and Latino Health." *American Journal of Public Health* 99(12): 2167-75.
- Viruell-Fuentes, Edna A., Patricia Y. Miranda, and Sawsan Abdulrahim. 2012. "More than Culture: Structural Racism, Intersectionality Theory, and Immigrant Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 75(12): 2099-2106.
- Waldinger, Roger and Cynthia Feliciano. 2004. "Will the New Second Generation Experience 'Downward Assimilation'? Segmented Assimilation Re-assessed." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(3):376-402.
- Waters, Mary C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Waters, Mary C. 1994. "Ethnic and Racial Identities of Second-generation Black Immigrants in New York City." *International Migration Review* 28(4):795-820.
- Waters, Mary C., Van C. Tran, Philip Kasinitz, and John H. Mollenkopf. 2010. "Segmented Assimilation Revisited: Types of Acculturation and Socioeconomic Mobility in Young Adulthood." *Ethnic Racial Studies* 33(7):1168-93.
- Weiss, Robert S. 1995. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Williams, David R. and Ruth Williams-Morris. 2000. Racism and Mental Health: The African American Experience. *Ethnicity & Health* 5(3/4):243-68.
- Williams, David R., Harold W. Neighbors, and James S. Jackson. 2003. "Racial/Ethnic Discrimination and Health: Findings from Community Studies." *American Journal of Public Health* 93(2):200-08.

- Williams, David and Selina A. Mohammed. 2009. "Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Health: Evidence and Needed Research." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 32:20-47.
- Williams, David R. and Michelle Sternthal. 2010. "Understanding Racial-Ethnic Disparities in Health: Sociological Contributions." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51:S15
- Witherell, Carol and Nel Noddings. 1991. *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- World Health Organization 2012. "Depression: A Global Public Health Concern." Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Retrieved December 10, 2013 ([http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/management/depression/who\\_paper\\_depression\\_wfmh\\_2012.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/who_paper_depression_wfmh_2012.pdf) Accessed 16.6.2012).
- Yamamoto, Ryoko. 2007. "Crossing Boundaries: Legality and the Power of the State in Unauthorized Migration." *Sociology Compass* 1(1):95-110.
- Yoshikawa, Hirokazu. 2011. *Immigrants Raising Citizens: Undocumented Parents and Their Children*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Yosso, Tara J. 2005. "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8(1):69-91.
- Yosso, Tara J., William A. Smith, Miguel Ceja, and Daniel Solórzano. 2009. "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates." *Harvard Educational Review* 79(4):659-91.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2009. "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics." Pp. 44-60 in *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class, & Gender*, edited by M. T. Berger and K. Guidroz. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Zambrana, Ruth E. and Olivia Cater-Pokras. 2001. "Health Data Issues for Hispanics: Implications for Public Health Research." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 12(1):20-34.
- Zhou, Min. 1997. "Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation." *International Migration Review* 31(4): 975-1008.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **An Intersectional Approach to Assimilation and Mental Health among Mexican-origin Women in the United States**

##### **Introduction**

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating your experiences related to nativism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and racism in the United States. You were selected to participate in this research study because you are of Mexican-origin and a woman that lives in the Houston area. The purpose of this study is to understand how and to what extent anti-immigrant sentiment affects mental health, particularly depression.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked questions about your experiences in the United States and your personal background by an interviewer. The interview will be audio recorded and will last about one hour. Interviews will later be transcribed into word documents. You have the right not to be audio recorded. Audio recordings are helpful because it allows the researcher to capture the participants' words exactly as they were stated. If you do not want to be recorded that is perfectly fine and the interview will proceed. Additionally, you will be asked to complete two short survey/scales that measure depressive symptoms.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, there will be sensitive topics discussed throughout the interview, like depression, migration experience, racism, and discrimination experiences in the United States.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, this study can lead to policy implementation or suggestions for programs that can address the needs of Mexican-origin women. Also, your participation and stories will help better address some of the current issues on two hotly debated topics, like immigration and mental health.

##### **Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential. Your name will not be released. The records of this study will be kept private. No information linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. If you decide to participate, you are able to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at anytime without your relations with the university being affected.

If you choose to participate in this study, you have the right to choose to be audio recorded. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored securely and only San Juanita García and Dr. Zulema Valdez will have access to the records. Any recordings will be kept for 5 years and then erased.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

You can contact San Juanita García at (832) 641-1418, [sanjuanita@neo.tamu.edu](mailto:sanjuanita@neo.tamu.edu), or Dr. Zulema Valdez at (979) 847-9494, [zvaldez@tamu.edu](mailto:zvaldez@tamu.edu), with any questions or concerns.

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

**Participation**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. If you would like to be in the study, then the interviewer will schedule a time and place to meet.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **An Intersectional Approach to Assimilation and Mental Health among Mexican-origin Women in the United States**

##### **Introduction**

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating your experiences related to nativism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and racism in the United States. You were selected to participate in this research study because you are of Mexican-origin and a woman that lives in the Houston area. The purpose of this study is to understand how and to what extent anti-immigrant sentiment affects mental health, particularly depression.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked questions about your experiences in the United States and your personal background by an interviewer. The interview will be audio recorded and will last about one hour. Interviews will later be transcribed into word documents. You have the right not to be audio recorded. Audio recordings are helpful because it allows the researcher to capture the participants' words exactly as they were stated. If you do not want to be recorded that is perfectly fine and the interview will proceed. Additionally, you will be asked to complete two short survey/scales that measure depressive symptoms.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, there will be sensitive topics discussed throughout the interview, like depression, family migration experience, racism, and discrimination experiences in the United States.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, this study can lead to policy implementation or suggestions for programs that can address the needs of Mexican-origin women. Also, your participation and stories will help better address some of the current issues on two hotly debated topics, like immigration and mental health.

##### **Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential. Your name will not be released. The records of this study will be kept private. No information linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. If you decide to participate, you are able to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at anytime without your relations with the university being affected.

If you choose to participate in this study, you have the right to choose to be audio recorded. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored securely and only San Juanita García and Dr. Zulema Valdez will have access to the records. Any recordings will be kept for 5 years and then erased.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

You can contact San Juanita García at (832) 641-1418, [sanjuanita@neo.tamu.edu](mailto:sanjuanita@neo.tamu.edu), or Dr. Zulema Valdez at (979) 847-9494, [zvaldez@tamu.edu](mailto:zvaldez@tamu.edu), with any questions or concerns.

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

**Participation**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. If you would like to be in the study, then the interviewer will schedule a time and place to meet.

## APPENDIX C

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

#### (Mexican Immigrant Women)

Interview #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Interview Starts: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Interview Ends: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How old are you? Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your marital status? Are you:

- Single.....1
- Married.....2
- Divorced.....3
- Widowed.....4
- Never Married.....5
- Cohabiting.....6

3. In what state were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Community (e.g. village, town, city, rural versus urban)

4. What year did migrate to the United States? (If multiple, ask for all years)

Year \_\_\_\_\_

5. If you did not come straight to Houston, Texas, what year did you move here?

Year \_\_\_\_\_

6. What country was your mother born? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What country was your father born? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you have children?

Yes.....1

No.....2

If yes, how many children do you have and where were they born?  
(Get information for all children including those that live in Mexico).

Child 1 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 2 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 3 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 4 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many years of school have you completed?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 +

10. How many years of school have you completed in the United States?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 +

11. Do you speak English? If so, how well do you speak it? \_\_\_\_\_

Yes.....1

No.....2

12. Are you currently employed? If so, where do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

Yes.....1

No.....2

13. Income (Show Income Card): \_\_\_\_\_

\*If married then ask about their husbands demographic questions such as employment, country of origin, years in the U.S., primary language spoken, education, etc.

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

Education (Country of Birth) Years: \_\_\_\_\_

Education in the U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in the U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_

Year person emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Place/Location when First Migrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Language Spoken Most Often: \_\_\_\_\_

Income (Show Income Card): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much! This concludes the demographic portion of the interview. Now we will begin the actual interview questions. Do you have any questions before we go any further? If not, then we are ready to begin. Thank you again for agreeing to participate.

## APPENDIX D

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

#### (Mexican American Women)

Interview #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Interview Starts: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Interview Ends: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your marital status? Are you:

- Single.....1
- Married.....2
- Divorced.....3
- Widowed.....4
- Never Married.....5
- Cohabiting.....6

3. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What country was your mother born? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What country was your father born? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What country were your grandparents born? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What generation do you consider yourself to be? \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many years of school have you completed?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 +

9. Do you speak any other language besides English?

Yes.....1

No.....2

If so, what language and how well do you speak it? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you have children?

Yes.....1

No.....2

If yes, how many children do you have and where were they born?  
(Get information for all children including those that live in Mexico).

Child 1 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 2 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 3 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

Child 4 (Sex): \_\_\_\_\_ Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are you currently employed? If so, where do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

Yes.....1

No.....2

12. Income (Show Income Card): \_\_\_\_\_

\*If married then ask about their husbands demographic questions such as employment, country of origin, years in the U.S., primary language spoken, education, etc.

Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

Education (Country of Birth) Years: \_\_\_\_\_

Education in the U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_

Years in the U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_

Year person emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Place/Location when First Migrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Language Spoken Most Often: \_\_\_\_\_

Income (Show Income Card): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much! This concludes the demographic portion of the interview. Now we will begin the actual interview questions. Do you have any questions before we go any further? If not, then we are ready to begin. Thank you again for agreeing to participate.



## APPENDIX E

### QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

#### **Mexican Immigrant Women**

##### **Pre-Migration:**

1. Can you please describe your childhood? How was it growing up for you?
2. What did you do before migrating to the U.S.?
3. Did you ever have the desire to migrate and move to the U.S.? Explain why or why not?
4. What were your views/opinions about the U.S. before migrating?

##### **Migration Decisions:**

5. Why did you decide and what motivated you to migrate to the United States?
6. How did you first enter the United States?
7. How did you prepare in your migration process to the United States?
8. How was the actual process of migrating to the United States, for example, how did you prepare economically, mentally, and physically in entering the United States? (e.g. what was the process of obtaining a visa to enter the U.S. like for you?) (This question depends on how they entered the United States, e.g. with or without authorization).
9. Was the actual migration experience something you anticipated, please explain?
10. How do you feel about having migrated to the United States as a woman? For instance, do you feel it's more difficult, please explain?

##### **Post-Migration - Incorporation:**

11. What would you say are the biggest differences/similarities between Mexican and American cultures?
12. How does your role as a Mexican-origin woman impact your influences in adjusting to the United States culture?
13. Do you speak any other language than Spanish? If so, which one and how well do you speak it?
14. Were you able to easily find a job? (This questions depends on if they are currently employed) Probe: How did you find this job?
15. Please describe the neighborhood you live in and how it makes you feel? (If they work, then ask: Please describe your job environment and how it makes you feel?)
16. Do you feel "you belong" in this country? Explain why or why not.
17. Do you feel the United States (e.g. Americans) accept Mexicans? Explain why or why not.

**Perceptions of Nativism, Racism, and Discrimination:**

18. When someone mentions the topic immigration, what automatically comes to mind?
19. Can you please describe your feelings on what it is like to live in the United States as a Mexican immigrant?
20. How do you feel about the deportations and raids taking place by ICE?
21. Have you, a personal friend, or family member ever experienced first-hand confrontations with ICE and if so please explain the situation?
22. What are your opinions about unauthorized immigration to the U.S.?
23. Have you felt discrimination in the United States, if so please describe your experiences and how they affected you? (Probe and ask if they felt discrimination based on race, gender, age, class, etc.)
24. Do you believe racism exists in the U.S. and if so provide examples? If not, then explain why you believe this?
25. What have you found to be the most challenging and how do you handle these challenges?
26. Do you feel you have had more opportunities in the U.S. compared to Mexico? Explain what types of opportunities.

**Intra-Ethnic Relations:**

27. Do you have undocumented or documented Mexican family members or friends?
28. From your opinion, what are the similarities and differences between US-born Mexicans and immigrant Mexicans?
29. From your opinion, do you believe Mexicans and Chicana/os get along or is there a divide between these groups? Why do you believe this and where does it stem from?

**Depression:**

30. What do you know about depression?
31. What do think causes depression? Where does depression stem from?
32. Have you ever felt depressed now that you live in the United States? If so please describe your symptoms or feelings?
33. How does this relate to your experiences in Mexico?
34. What do you think makes you depressed the most?
35. Have you ever sought help for depression from a mental health professional? If so, please explain that experience. If not, why not?
36. Do you have any worries now that you live in the United States, and if so what are your biggest worries?
37. What have you found to be the most challenging in your life and how do you handle these challenges or how have you handled these challenges?
38. How do you cope with depression? (If respondent replied they have never felt depression then probe as to how do they overcome feelings of sadness?)
39. How do you think depression is viewed in Mexico?
40. How do you think depression is viewed in the United States?

41. Do you have health insurance or how do you get mental health services when you need them? How did you learn about these services?

**Future Plans:**

42. What are your future plans in the US? Do you plan to return to Mexico?  
43. How do you feel currently with the economic crisis in Mexico and in the United States?  
44. What do you think about the current immigration debate?  
45. Do you have any questions/concerns/suggestions regarding the study or anything I left out that you wish me to include?

Thank you, this concludes our interview portion of the study. Now we will complete the two short scales. Are you ready to begin?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

#### **U.S.-born Mexican American Women**

##### **Immigration Family History:**

1. Can you please describe your childhood? How was it growing up for you?
2. When did your (parents/grandparents/great grandparents) arrive to the U.S.?
3. Do you know the reasons as to why and how their migration experience was? If so, can you tell me about it please?
4. What did your (parents/grandparents/great grandparents) do (e.g. work) when coming to the U.S.? (pre and post migration)
5. Tell me about your childhood life? How was it for you growing up?

##### **Incorporation:**

6. What would you say are the biggest differences/similarities between Mexican and American cultures?
7. How does your role as a Mexican American woman impact your life?
8. Do you speak any other language than English? If so, which one and how well do you speak it? How did you learn it? Do you believe it is important to be bilingual?
9. Please describe the neighborhood you live in and how it makes you feel? (If they work, then ask: Please describe your job environment and how it makes you feel?)
10. Do you feel “you belong” in this country? Explain why or why not.
11. Do you feel that the larger US society accepts and welcomes Mexicans to the US? Please explain why or why not you think this.

##### **Perceptions of Nativism, Racism, and Discrimination:**

12. When someone mentions the topic immigration, what automatically comes to mind?
13. Can you please describe your feelings on what it is like to live in the United States as a Mexican American?
14. How do you feel about the deportations and raids taking place by ICE?
15. Have you, a personal friend, or family member ever experienced first-hand confrontations with ICE and if so please explain the situation?
16. What are your opinions about unauthorized immigration to the U.S.?
17. Have you felt discrimination in the United States, if so please describe your experiences and how they affected you? (Probe and ask if they felt discrimination based on race, gender, age, class, etc.)
18. Do you believe racism exists in the US and if so provide examples? If not, then explain why you believe this?

19. Do you feel you have had more opportunities in the U.S. compared to your parents? Explain what types of opportunities.
20. How do you racially identify and why?

**Intra-Ethnic Relations:**

21. Do you have undocumented or documented Mexican friends?
22. From your opinion, what are the similarities and differences between U.S.-born Mexicans and immigrant Mexicans?
23. From your opinion, do you believe Mexicans and U.S.-born Mexicans get along or is there a divide between these groups? If so, where do you think this stems from?

**Depression:**

24. What do you know about depression?
25. What do you think causes depression? Where does depression stem from?
26. Have you ever felt depressed; if so please describe your symptoms or feelings?
27. What mainly depresses you? What makes you depressed the most?
28. Have you ever sought help for depression from a mental health professional? If so, please explain that experience. If not, why not?
29. Do you have any worries and if so what are your biggest worries?
30. What have you found to be the most challenging in your life and how do you handle these challenges or how have you handled these challenges?
31. How do you cope with depression? (If respondent replied they have never felt depression then probe as to how do they overcome feelings of sadness?)
32. How do you think Mexicans view depression?
33. How do you think Americans view depression?
34. Do you have health insurance or how do you get mental health services when you need them? How did you learn about these services?

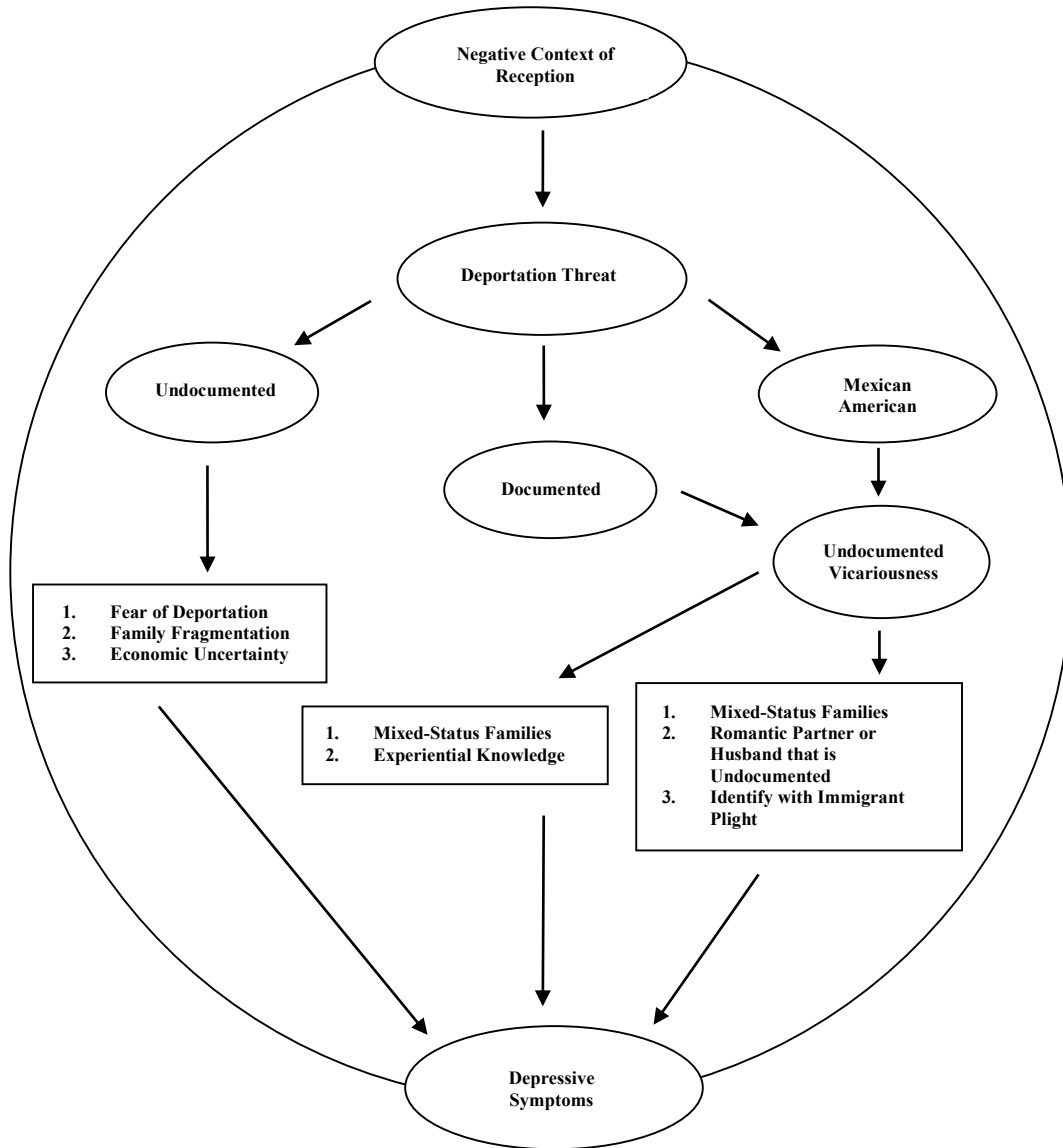
**Future Plans:**

35. What are your future plans in the U.S.? Do you travel to Mexico frequently or do you intend to do so one day?
36. What are your thoughts about the violence in Mexico?
37. What do you think about the current immigration debate?
38. Do you have any questions/concerns/suggestions regarding the study or anything I left out that you wish me to include?

Thank you, this concludes our interview portion of the study. Now we will complete the two short scales. Are you ready to begin?

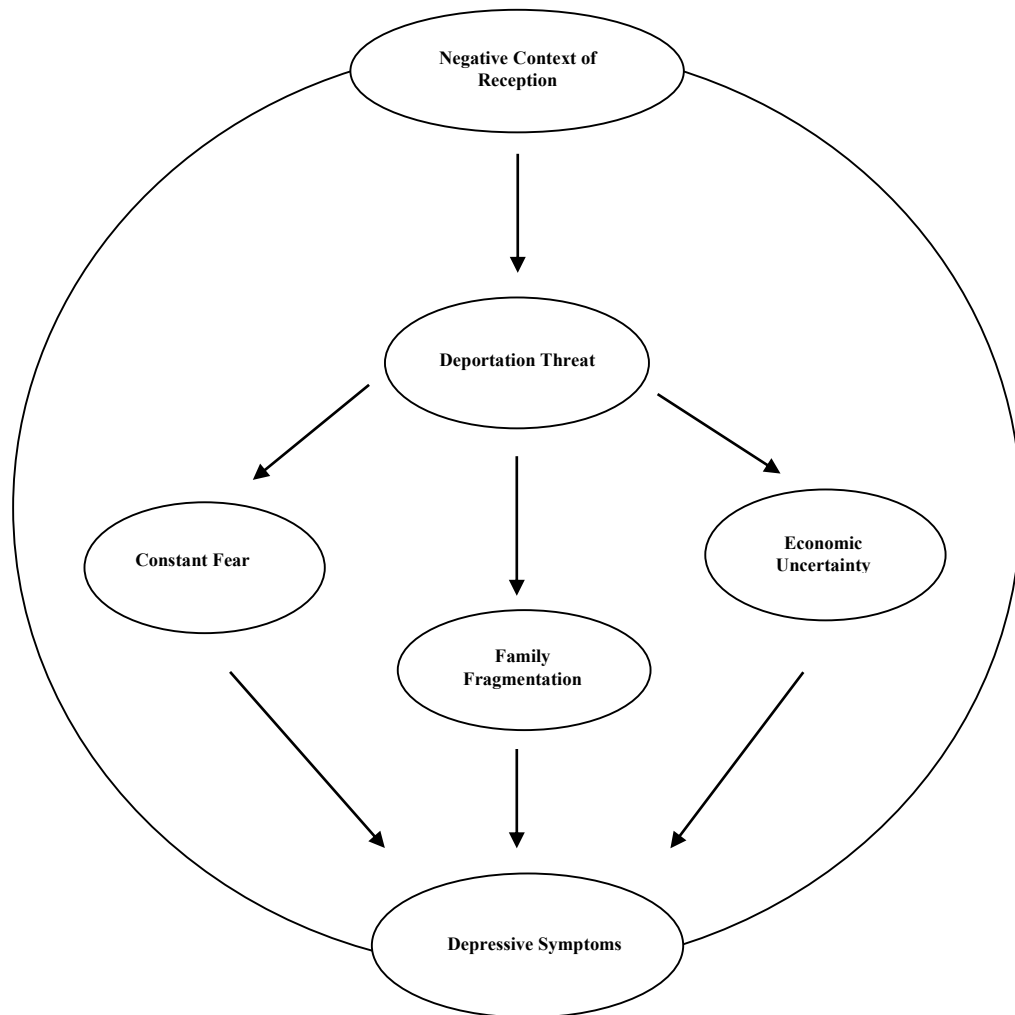
## APPENDIX G

Mind Map 1: Findings for Mexican-Origin Women



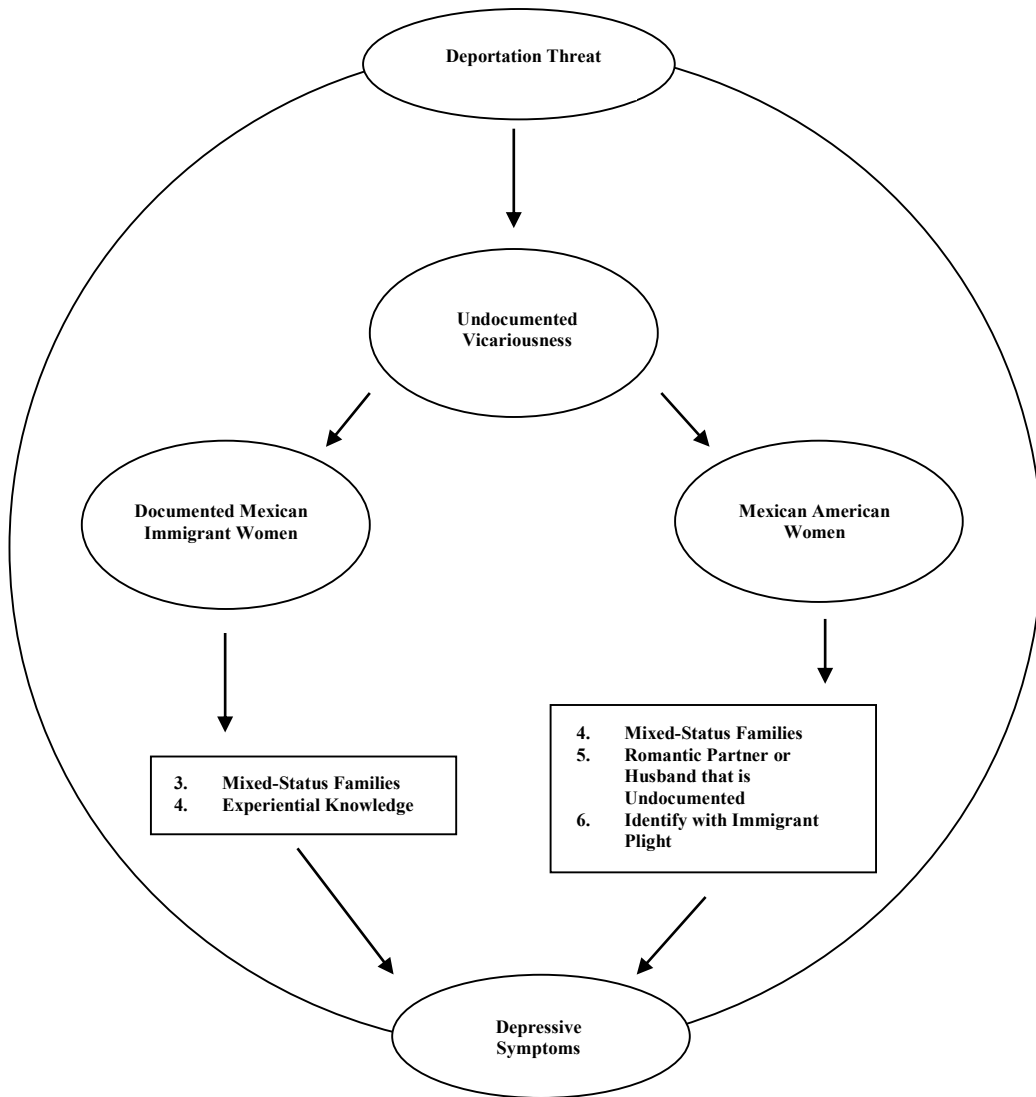
## APPENDIX H

Mind Map 2: Findings for Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Women



## APPENDIX I

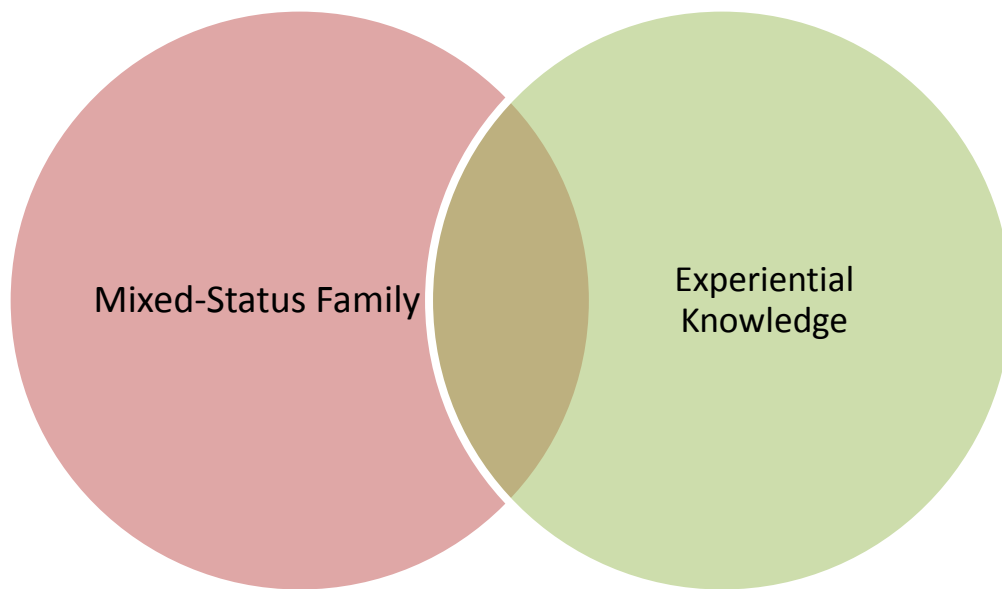
Mind Map 3: Undocumented Vicariousness





## APPENDIX J

Venn Diagram: Undocumented Vicariousness: Documented Mexican Immigrant Women



## APPENDIX K

Venn Diagram: Undocumented Vicariousness: Mexican American Women

